

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have petitions today from citizens of the province of Saskatchewan who would like to see the provincial and federal government take the initiative of reducing fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. 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 the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon, from Melfort, and from the James Smith Reserve.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens with their continuing concern about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Melfort, even from Lacombe, Alberta.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, as well to present petitions regarding the fuel tax. Reading the prayer:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe the petition is signed by individuals from the community of Saskatoon.

I so present.

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from the community of Melfort.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition regarding the high cost of fuel, and the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

And this is signed by citizens of Kinistino, Saskatoon, Melfort, and Nipawin.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people concerned about the high price of 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.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Swift Current, and a gentleman who apparently feels sorry for us, from Medicine Hat.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from signatures in Strasbourg, Unity, Bulyea, Duval, and a good many more from Strasbourg.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present a petition regarding cellular telephone coverage. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to

provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea.

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

This petition is signed from citizens in the Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea area.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure this afternoon to bring a petition to this House to stop municipal reserve account confiscation. And, Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads as follows:

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

And it is in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people from Paddockwood, Christopher Lake, and Candle Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens concerned with poor cellular telephone service. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular service in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea.

And the petitioners come from the communities of Strasbourg, Silton, Duval, Govan, Cymric, and numerous other communities.

I do so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring forth a petition regarding the high price of fuel.

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

And the petitions are signed by the good citizens from the towns of Spiritwood, Shell Lake, and Leoville.

I so present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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.

Petitions of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on

the following matters:

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital;

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

To abandon plans to confiscate municipal reserve accounts; and

To ensure reliable cellular service to Watson, Prud'homme, Bruno, Vonda, and Cudworth.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Clerk: — Mr. Wartman, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills presents the second report of the committee which is as follows:

Your committee has considered the following Bills and has agreed to report the same without amendment:

Bill No. 301 - The Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Act

Bill No. 302 - The Renaming of The Regina Golf Club Act

Bill No. 303 - The Saskatchewan Roman Catholic Dioceses Reorganization Act

And further that the fees respecting Bills 301 and 303 be remitted to the petitioners less the cost of printing.

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here regarding the . . . it's Bill No. 302 — The Renaming of The Regina Golf Club Act. And I'm a little confused as to which step I'm supposed to be taking here at this moment. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . To read this Bill in? Thank you.

That the committee report the Bill . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order, please. I believe the member would wish to move a concurrence motion at this time. Order. Order, please.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Clerk that I have the correct motion here; moved by myself, seconded by the member from Humboldt:

That the second report of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills be now concurred in and that the said Bills be accordingly referred to the Committee of the Whole by leave of the Assembly later this day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome in the east gallery 37 students, grade 8 students, from the Rosetown Central High School. Mr. Speaker, they are accompanied by three teachers: Miles Bennett, Melody Newman, and Val Honekey. I hope I've pronounced that last name correctly, and one chaperone Mr. Freistadt.

It's a great pleasure to have a grade 8 class from my riding of Rosetown-Biggar here. They are seeing some sights in Regina. They are here to observe the proceedings of the legislature and I have an opportunity to meet with them after question period. I'm looking forward to it.

Would all members of the Legislative Assembly welcome the grade 8 class from Rosetown.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we've got the pleasure today of having some guests from the Midwest legislatures in the United States. And yesterday of course I was very pleased to be at the ceremony presided by yourself, Mr. Speaker, where the Saskatchewan branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association affiliated with and signed an affiliation agreement with the Midwest senators and legislators and by doing that we have formalized a relationship with them.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, the visiting members I want to report are having a busy day. They got up prior to 8 o'clock because they had to be in House leaders at 8, then went to see the cabinet for a while — cabinet meeting — had a bit of a coffee break, went to private members' Bills in a committee meeting; went to see how the coalition caucus operates, to this afternoon, they're going . . . after question period they're going to be going to Moose Jaw, maybe get into the pilot's seat for a little while, Mr. Speaker.

So I want the legislature once again to welcome Senator — and if they could stand please — Senator DiAnna Schimek from Lincoln, Nebraska; Senator Paul Feleciano from Wichita, Kansas; and Senator Rick Wardner from Dickinson, North Dakota. And these are the three stalwart ones. Senator Bob Drake has left for Winnipeg and back home earlier today. So welcome again.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all colleagues in the Assembly seated in the west gallery, 58 grade 4 students from St. Marguerite Bourgeoys School in the constituency of Regina Wascana Plains.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, our guests in the gallery have been part of a wonderful adventure — first to gather information and

material for a time capsule and had some of their fellow students come earlier to put that into the dome area of the legislature. So following the question period today, I'll meet with them and we'll have an opportunity to go up and look at the placement of the time capsule and have a chance to visit.

Saint Marguerite is partnered with SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) on also helping to update and maintain material on a web site on the history of the legislature and the progress on the work that's being done to restore this wonderful capital of ours. So we do have an exciting afternoon planned.

The students today are accompanied by Ms. Porter — their teachers, Ms. Porter, Ms. Davies, and Ms. Faber. I ask all members to join me in a warm welcome for the students from St. Marguerite Bourgeoys School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure today to introduce to you and to my colleagues in the legislature, through you, a group of 22 grade 6 students from Dieppe School in my constituency of Regina Sherwood, Mr. Speaker.

They've been here for a visit. We've had a chance to have a short visit with them already and picture taking. And, Mr. Speaker, they're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Wally Sadowsky. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say, like my colleague from Regina Dewdney, would also like to pass along hello to Mr. Sadowsky, and please join with me in welcoming all my students from Dieppe School here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you two guests who are joining us in your gallery today. We have with us Father Ken Miller who is the Vicar General of the archdiocese, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina. Father Ken if you could just stand up. Thank you. And then accompanying him is Maurice Rieder who is the business manager for — and my favourite word — Archiepiscopal Corporation of Regina. If you'd join with me in welcoming our guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to welcome Father Miller who is representing the Roman Catholic diocese of Saskatchewan here today. As well as welcoming Mr. Maurice Rieder.

In addition, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome to the proceedings today members of the Mennonite Central Committee, and they are seated just behind Father Miller.

And so if the Assembly would join me in welcoming these fine people today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to join with my colleagues in welcoming Father Ken Miller. He may not remember, but I'm one of his parishioners in Holy Trinity. I say this fondly, Father, as our children go to school at St. Mary and we try to attend Holy Trinity when we can. But welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you two people seated in the Speaker's gallery who are living representatives of the Mennonite Central Committee mission statement. I would like to introduce to you the Chair, Lucille Wall, from Swift Current and the executive director, Bruno Baerg, from Saskatoon.

Both these people work to demonstrate God's love; to serve as a channel of interchange by building relationships that are mutually transformative; and they work for peace, justice, and dignity of all people. I would ask all members of the House to welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to join with the member from Saskatoon Southeast in welcoming the representatives from the Mennonite Central Committee, especially its Chairperson, Lucille Wall, who is from Swift Current and my constituency. And we also go to the same church. And before I started taking on other duties, we ushered together for a while. But I'd just like to join with the hon. member in welcoming Lucille here to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Hon. members, the Speaker also has someone special in his gallery today and I would ask that you allow me to introduce to you and welcome my nephew, Blain Van Melle. Blain is a student, he's studying agricultural economics. He's here to see the proceedings and I ask you to welcome him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National Junior Debating Championship

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, and to the attention of this Assembly a significant event that occurred in my constituency in the town of Edam and the Edam community last Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

The event was the National Junior Debating Championship. There were 48 young debaters all between the approximate ages of 13 to 16. These young people represented Canada from British Columbia to Quebec, from the Maritimes to the Northwest Territories.

The level of debate was excellent and an example from which a politician like myself could learn. The political teams were outstanding representatives of their province and demonstrated

excellent examples of enthusiasm, and commitment, and the maturity of our future adult citizens.

Winners were judged from each province as well as overall individual and team debaters. And I was particularly proud of the Saskatchewan team and their performance. Actually just to be selected for this competition was in fact to be a winner.

I would like to compliment the community of Edam, the local high school and staff, the Turtleford School Division, and many citizens that volunteered as hosts, billets, organizers. And a particular commendation must go to Mr. Byron Merkosky for spearheading this national event.

And in a word, to Edam and community, well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Paragon Awards

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure to attend this past Saturday evening here in Regina the first annual Paragon Awards of the Regina Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of these awards are to recognize business excellence in Regina and area. And congratulations, Mr. Speaker, should go out to the Paragon Awards committee of the Regina Chamber of Commerce, and their Chair, Barbara De La Sablonniere and her committee.

Mr. Speaker, there were seven awards that were handed out on Saturday night, and I'll just read through them very quickly in the time that I have, and the sponsors.

Mr. Speaker the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, sponsored by Scotia McLeod went to Ecol Laser Services; the Community Involvement Award, sponsored by CTV (Canadian Television Network Limited) Regina, went to the Cathedral Village Free House; the Marketing and Promotion Achievement Award, sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada, went to Rainbow Cinemas in the city; the Export Achievement Award, sponsored by SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation) went to Off the Wall Productions; the Customer Service Excellence Awards, sponsored by Advantage Sign and Display Systems, went to the Regina Travelodge South; The New Business Venture of the Year, sponsored by the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority, went to Allstar Technologies Incorporated; and the Business of the Year, Mr. Speaker, sponsored by the Regina Chamber of Commerce, went to Bennett Dunlop Ford.

Congratulations from all of us to these winners and the chamber on the first annual awards. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Big River Regional Health Care Centre Opens

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not always that I get to stand in this Assembly today and give credit to a member opposite but I will attempt to now.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure I stand today to give credit to the Minister of Health on allowing the opening of the Regional Health Care Centre in Big River. Yesterday my wife and I, along with the minister of mines from Prince Albert, attended the grand opening. Although it is not classified as a hospital, it is a health centre which offers much to health care in and around the Big River area.

I also want to extend congratulations to the people in and around Big River area for coming together and help making this dream come true. Also the staff of this new regional health care centre are to be commended for their commitment to this project as well. Their visions, their goals, and their objectives have been realized. And they are the ones who should be recognized here today. It is important to remember that accessibility is one of the five guiding principles of health care as listed under the Canada Health Act, something that we are all entitled to.

As we look forward to the future we must work to build a place in which our children can also work and prosper in, where they can see hope and opportunity and optimism. To the residents of Big River and area, sincere congratulations are in order on a job well done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today in joining the member from Spiritwood in congratulating the Minister of Health for a job well done. As he indicated we joined the Parkland Health District and the town of Big River, there were surrounding RMs (rural municipalities), people from those municipalities, and we gathered to celebrate the opening of an integrated health care facility.

And I think that really does demonstrate what can happen when communities work together with their local governments, the district health board, and the province of Saskatchewan. That group raised in the neighbourhood of \$1 million towards a \$3 million integrated facility that includes new acute care beds, the nursing home, a trauma centre, and other services.

I want to, Mr. Speaker, congratulate all of the people in the Big River district for working together to deliver to themselves a service for themselves that I think will go a long way in terms of the stability and the health of what is a very, very vibrant logging and farming community. So I congratulate them all and I know the member from Spiritwood will ensure that the folks are well looked after during his tenure as the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for that area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Occupational Safety and Health Week

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today in recognition of North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. Mr. Speaker, this year's theme is "Work Safely for a Healthy Future," and this is a very important message that all people in the workplace should adhere to.

Mr. Speaker, it was not too long ago that we recognized all those workers who have lost their lives or have been seriously

injured on the job, and it is all of our responsibility to ensure that the workplace is as safe as possible.

Safety affects all people of all ages. And as the saying goes, Mr. Speaker, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If all the workers just took a few minutes to familiarize themselves with their surrounding and all the work-related hazards, many injuries could be prevented.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend all those involved with raising safety awareness and hope that all workplaces in our province and across Canada remain as safe as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

By-election in Newfoundland

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night in Newfoundland the NDP (New Democratic Party) came within a fraction of winning the by-election in St. John's West. Greg Malone, actor and committed social activist, took the NDP from 15 per cent of the popular vote in the last federal election to over 35 per cent in last night's by-election.

Since the beginning of the current session, the Reform Party, turned to a party referred to by the initials CRAAP (Canadian reform and alliance party), turned Canadian Alliance, have hammered the federal government on the HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) scandal while Alexa McDonough and the NDP have continuously fought for issues most important to Canadians — jobs, the economy, and in particular health care.

The results last night spoke volumes. When you speak up for ordinary Canadians, ordinary Canadians will trust you with their vote.

Last night also shed some light on other political parties. Joe Clark's Tories held on for a win in a seat that has been solidly Tory since Newfoundland joined Confederation. And the Reform Canadian Alliance, they finished with a resounding 4 per cent of the popular vote. So much for their attempts to revamp themselves as the new alternative to the Liberals.

The Alliance finished only 1,000 votes ahead of the candidate for the Extreme Wrestling Party, who received 1 per cent of the vote.

I'd like to ask the members opposite, who consider themselves to be an alliance of right-wingers, which national party do they identify with? You say you aren't Tories, so we won't even ponder that question. Are you supporters of the Canadian Alliance? Your party has been called the prototype . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Letters of Concern about Pornography

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm rising today in this Assembly in front of my colleagues on both sides of the House to tell you about some letters that I have

received in my home constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, these letters are from people concerned about government-funded pornography. These letters are on top of the numerous phone calls my office and our caucus office has received on this particular issue. The letters are from the communities of Birch Hills and Weldon.

Mr. Speaker, these letters show concern from the people of this province about government-funded pornography. The letters state very strongly their objections to what the government did.

The letters, Mr. Speaker, are also opposed to SaskTel providing funding for the screening of pornographic films.

Mr. Speaker, these people told me what they like to do is have these letters entered into the record. So, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to be able to table these letters on their behalf.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Straw Bale House

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have good news for families in need and good news for constituents in my community. A partnership between Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and Namerind Housing Corporation has constructed a new and innovative type of housing — a straw bale house.

The design of this house is unique in that it uses straw bales in the construction of the walls and ceilings. This creates a high insulation factor well beyond that of conventional homes.

Also, contrary to what most people would think when first hearing about a straw bale house, this type of construction appears to be more resistant to fires than the standard wood frame construction.

Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provided the land and a \$25,000 capital grant towards this innovation. Namerind Housing owns and manages the house. This means that an actual family in need of good accommodations will be able to access quality shelter.

Mr. Speaker, this project, in partnership with Namerind Housing, is another example how innovative and creative housing solutions can be achieved when people work together. And, Mr. Speaker, despite all the huffing and the puffing of the opposition, that's one straw house they won't be able to blow down. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Construction Industry

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Madam Minister, in 1998 your department hired a

retired union organizer, Gus Zaba, to do a report on the issue of spinoff contracting. And you paid Mr. Zaba over \$20,000 for two months' work. It must have been quite a report.

Madam Minister, taxpayers paid over \$20,000 for this report — will you table this report today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because this report predated by time this minister, I have been told about the substance of the report but I do not actually have a copy. So I will get back to the member with what we have in regards to that report. I just don't have a copy with me.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Madam Minister, it's our understanding that Mr. Zaba met exclusively with unionized contractors, with the exception of one five-minute meeting with the Saskatchewan Construction Association during which he said the only solution was to sweep all the non-union contractors into the unions.

Madam Minister, you paid a union organizer \$20,000 to meet with unionized contractors and promote your forced unionization policy. Isn't that a typical NDP process? Tell the guy what you want him to say and then pay him \$20,000 to go out and say it.

Madam Minister, will you table a list of the companies Mr. Zaba met with during his two month contract? Will you release his final report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We have had opinions, Mr. Speaker, from Mr. Zaba on this, but we've also had opinions from Mr. Kelleher and from Larry Seiferling and from many other legal people. So I would have to say that in a matter like this, you try to get a range of opinions that represent all points of view.

But I would have to say is that it makes sense to me that you would hire someone who is sensitive to the issues that might be raised by people and who understands the issue, because it's clear to me, over and over again, that the opposition does not understand this issue. Because otherwise, I don't see why they would suggest we would have a Bill that's different than the same Bill in every other province in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Well, Madam Minister, we understand it very clearly. Mr. Speaker, let's just review this independent report the minister commissioned. You hire a union organizer, he goes out and talks to unionized companies. Then he comes back and recommends forced unionization. You give them a pat on the head and \$20,000 and then you use this financing to bring in your forced unionization policy.

Madam Minister, this had nothing to do with what's best for the industry. This has nothing to do with what's best for the workers. This has everything to do with paying off the unions who in turn pay off the NDP.

Madam Minister, will you release Mr. Zaba's report? What are you hiding?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know how I can be more clear. No matter where these companies operated in Canada, they would be operating under exactly the same rules. In fact, the Government of Ontario recently reviewed their rules. They did a three-month survey of the industry and they ended up not changing the same provisions that these members are referring to.

So I would have to say that any company that operates in Canada operates under these same rules in every province, and why these people think that working people in the industry should have a different standard here, I can't understand.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, this is quite an incestuous little relationship the NDP has going with the unions. The NDP needed more money from the unions. The unions needed more money from the workers. So the NDP gives money to a union organizer to recommend forcing more workers into the union so that the unions can extract more money from the workers and the NDP can extract more money from the unions. What a cozy little arrangement — except it completely ignores the wishes of the 80 per cent of construction workers who don't belong to a union and don't want to belong to a union.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Madam Minister, your new legislation will force thousands of workers to join a union against their will. Will you cancel this unfair and undemocratic Bill?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I don't understand why the opposition is so anti-worker, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter that they have . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, that they have totally bought into the editorial line of the aspiring Lord Black does not surprise, given the size of donations that he made to their party. But if they feel a need to do that I guess that's their choice, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Home Care in Living Sky Health District

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, there is an elderly gentleman in the Living Sky Health District who receives one and a half hours of home care every two weeks. He paid \$30 a month for this service, and he required this service because he was going blind.

Mr. Speaker, in a letter dated April 20, the health care district notified all of their home care clients saying that they would be reassessed, and they may be discharged from services. They

notified this man who was extremely limited in vision, by a letter. Within one week they discontinued his service without any further notice.

Madam Minister, what reassessment criteria was used to determine whether or not a person needs home care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Living Sky had a review of its home care services and found that they were using different criteria than other districts in the province. They're now going to use the same criteria that Saskatoon and Regina use.

I do want to say though that the CIHI, which we spoke about — it's the Canadian Institute of Health Information — has said that Saskatchewan health care is very strong, and public spending in health care in Saskatchewan is very strong. It says that we have the second highest among the provinces. And it reports that public dollars account for almost three-quarters of the spending in health in Saskatchewan. So we do have a very strong, publicly supported system, including home care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The home care service was so important in Living Sky Health District and they knew their recipient so well that this man received an obscure letter from the health district saying that clients might be discharged from home care. And then without further contact, his service was just stopped. The provider never even bothered showing up.

When he contacted a home care coordinator he got an answering machine, which said that she was off on stress leave indefinitely. The second coordinator he talked to didn't even know what his status was.

This man just two years ago personally donated \$100,000 to the local hospital. He also donated 10,000 to the health lodge. He was paying for his service, \$30 a month.

Madam Minister, why are home care clients in the Living Sky Health District being discharged so abruptly, with no time and no consideration to help them find alternatives for service?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have one of the best home care systems in the country.

Other provinces, other provinces do not support the integrated system that we have. We are the envy of many of the provinces in the country and we do have a very high amount of public spending in our home care system.

This year of our hundred and thirteen new million dollars into the budget, much . . . five-point-something million dollars went into home care to strengthen our home care services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Long-term Care in Esterhazy

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my questions are also for the Minister of Health. Home care service is critical to keep people out of long-term care. And, Mr. Speaker, the long-term care system is far past its limit.

The case of a 79-year-old woman now occupying a bed in the Esterhazy hospital is an example. She is paying \$25 a day to stay in that bed because she is not an acute care patient and a long-term care bed is not available. She can't walk and needs help with feeding, bathing, and all personal care.

Yet the health district is saying she needs to be reassessed to determine if she even qualifies for long-term care. The family feels they can't deliver the care she requires. The hospital says she is taking up a bed they need. And if she qualifies for long-term care, she will be last on a 50-person waiting listing.

Madam Minister, how are seniors supposed to have any confidence that the health system in this province will deliver the long-term care they require?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before about home care, we have the best long-term care system in the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — We do have . . . We have 9,200 residents living in home . . . in long-term care facilities. They receive personal care, nursing care, room and board. Total care is provided in long-term care facilities.

We do support that through the publicly funded system and as I said before the CIHI information has said that Saskatchewan spends the second highest among the provinces on our publicly funded system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, and to the Minister of Health. I think that the people of Saskatchewan would like to take a vote on whether they think long-term care is good in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, when this woman receives an assessment and if she is deemed as needing either level . . .

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

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, when this woman receives an assessment and if she is deemed as needing either level 3 or 4 care, to find a bed in an appropriate facility near her family she will be last on a waiting list of at least 50 people. If she is not assessed level 3 or 4, her family does not know how they will cope. She cannot continue to take up a hospital bed in Esterhazy and she cannot afford private care.

Your government took away level 1 and 2 nursing home care and replaced it with home care. Now you are cancelling these services. The only option they have are private care personal homes which most seniors cannot . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. Order, order. Order, please. The hon. member has been quite lengthy in her preamble, kindly go directly to your question. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, your government is abandoning seniors in this province. Madam Minister, where are these people supposed to go?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there are certain cases where people have problems, we do welcome those individual cases to come directly to our offices.

But one thing I would like to say is one of the options that the opposition has put forward, including the member from Weyburn, is that we would privatize our health system. I wonder then which would be the first services to go? Would it be the acute care? Would it be home care? Would it be long-term care?

I think we would seriously look at what their platform would provide with no funding and privatization of the health system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health tells us that we have the best long-term care in this province. We have the best home care in this province. I would like to ask . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Bakken: — We have people across this province that are asking everyday where can I access long-term care and where can I access home care? What are the people of this province supposed to do for care, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we do have the best long-term care program in the country. We do have people . . . We have very few districts that have waiting lists.

We have alternatives to living in long-term care. We have a very strong home care system. We have a very strong support system. We have an integrated system where people have the option to stay at home if possible. We have a coordinated assessment unit so that people are coordinated through the system at one single entry point.

We have things in our system, Mr. Speaker, that are truly to the benefit of all the people that are in the health care system. And we do continue to try and make improvements in our system. We continue to add money, unlike the members opposite who promise nothing for health care and have no options but to

privatize.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Budgets of District Health Boards

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, yesterday was the deadline for all the health districts in the province to submit their 2000 plans including their 2000 budgets. Madam Minister, as of this afternoon how many health districts have submitted their 2000 budgets to you?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can report is that of the 32 districts, 29 districts have signed off their health plan and we have received another three draft plans. And my understanding is that the board members will have an opportunity to sign off on those three health plans by this evening.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I can report is that we have 32 health plans in my department, 29 have been approved by their boards, and we're waiting for three to be approved and I understand that they'll be approved today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, my question again then to the minister is if you have all of the plans in your possession, how soon are going to release those plans to the public? Madam Minister, we need a timeline on when you're going to do this.

When are you going to release the plans? When are you going to release the information about how many closures of facilities there's going to be? When are you going to release this plan and is it going to be before June 1 of this year?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can say to the member is that the Department of Health is going to be analysing all 32 health plans within a provincial context. Once we have undergone that work, and it requires detailed work, then all of the information will be released to the public. And I expect that the information will be released to the public in three to four weeks, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Madam Minister, in questions we've asked you before you've said you're going to indeed, and confirmed today, review these plans, then you're going to approve, reject, or modify. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have said that once we've had an opportunity to review all of the health plans within the provincial context, we will either approve the plan, disapprove the plan, or vary the plan for each of the health districts. But, Mr. Speaker, we want to review it within a provincial context.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Well, Madam Minister, what's up with this process? You put the district health boards through this whole convoluted thing that they have to do in secret.

Then you sit here and say to the Assembly and to the people of this province that it doesn't really matter what these health boards submit to you if you don't like it, because you're either going to modify it and send it back, or you're going to reject it and send it back. And if you approve it, it's only because they've complied with your draconian directives.

Madam Minister, what are you going to do if a health board refuses to implement the modifications that you're going to pose on them? What are you going to do to them? Are you going to fire them, or what are you going to do?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — You know, Mr. Speaker, each day in this legislature we listen to the members opposite use words like forced amalgamation, which this government . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, each day in this legislature we hear the members opposite use words like forced amalgamation, confiscation, forced unionization, and now gag orders, Mr. Speaker. And they call us pornographers.

Well I want to say this to the members opposite. There will be two things that this government will not do. We are not going to privatize health services and go for private . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We are not going to freeze health spending in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We are not going to say to the federal government, don't give the provinces any money. Because that's what that member opposite has said, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we are going to defend publicly funded and publicly administered health.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what the minister's going to do. She's going to order up a bunch of closed signs and putting them on health care facilities in this province. That's what she's going to do.

Madam Minister, again you ducked the question. I asked you, if district health boards are not going to implement your modified plans or your rejected plans, what are you going to do to those communities? Are you going to go in there and heavy-handedly close facilities anyway? Are you going to impose on them your will? What are you going to do, Madam Minister, if district health boards refuse to go along with modifications to their plans?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we are going to do what we've done for the last seven years with district health boards, and that is to continue to work with district health boards.

Mr. Speaker, what we are not going to do, what we are . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, please. The question has been asked and yet the response cannot be heard. Kindly allow the minister to answer the question. Order.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, what we are not going to do is freeze health spending. What we are not going to do is privatize surgical services in this province. And, Mr. Speaker, we are going to live up to the five tenets of the Canada Health Act which that party calls mindless slogans.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Madam Minister, you know this whole budget process is flawed from the very beginning.

You sit here and pretend that you have a transparent process that has good communication and dialogue and discussion with the communities. And yet time after time we demonstrated — and we've got a copy of the letter from your deputy minister — that district health boards were not allowed to discuss their plans that they are submitting to you. They're only allowed to get consultation in the process before they make the plan, and afterwards you are saying to this House that you may arbitrarily modify the plans, that you may arbitrarily reject the plans.

Madam Minister, this process is not democratic and it doesn't involve the people that are involved, either the health boards or the communities they serve. Madam Minister, you have to recognize this process is fatally flawed.

This afternoon I'll be introducing a motion that will suggest the process be changed. Will you support that motion, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, what the member is saying is, he doesn't want the government to modify health district plans. Let me just give you an example.

We have a health plan that came from the Living Sky Health District. And, Mr. Speaker, in that health plan they talk about the possibility of closing hospitals along the Yellowhead highway between Yorkton and Saskatoon.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this. The members on this side of the legislature are not going to agree to a health plan where there is no acute care facility between Yorkton and Regina. And I am surprised that that member wouldn't support that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, the whole process is as a

result of your imposed limitations on district health boards. You've got them with their backs against the wall. You created a system whereby you've left them with virtually no choice.

How in the world can they meet arbitrary budget targets of the 900 . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, please. Order please. Kindly allow the question to be asked. And I would just remind the hon. member to kindly direct comments through the Chair. That it's not a personal issue from both sides of the House.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister how she expects the possibility of district health boards to be able to meet the kinds of commitments of \$900,000 reductions in budgets. You can't do that by cutting back on the paper clip budget, Madam Minister. You are leaving them no choice. You've made them the target of a firing squad that you're manning.

Madam Minister, this is an impossible process. District health boards, including discussions at the SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) convention said the process is fatally flawed. South East District wrote you and said the process is flawed.

Madam Minister, will you support the proposal that we're going to make this afternoon that calls for an open, accountable system, and will you guarantee that there'll be no closures until you know what you're doing, which may take forever.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Paul Martin, the federal Minister of Finance, brought down his federal budget, I indicated at that time that there simply was not enough money for health care in this country.

Mr. Speaker, when the ministers of Health in this country were meeting to put pressure on the federal government to return the money that was taken out of the Canada Health and Social Transfer, what did the Leader of the Opposition say? The Leader of the Opposition said that Ottawa should hold back on more cash to the provinces. He . . . (inaudible) . . . in this country so that they can privatize it and the members opposite will never agree to that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

PRIVATE BILLS

Bill No. 301 — The Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Act

Clause 1

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my

pleasure and privilege to speak on behalf of Bill 301 because, as members will know, it is both a fairly non-controversial Bill, and at the same time an extremely important Bill for a very important group in Saskatchewan society.

This Bill will provide for a continued system of governance that the MCC (Mennonite Central Community) of Saskatchewan have been using for many, many years, but they will now be able to continue this as a not-for-profit corporation. This will allow . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, by passing this Bill, this will allow the Mennonite Central Committee of Saskatchewan to continue the work that they have been doing, along with MCC International, in over 54 countries.

(1430)

They have been doing relief, helping communities recover from natural disaster and human conflicts. They have been working to develop locally rooted, sustainable services in food security, health, education, and income generation. They have been working with community groups to build bridges of understanding and to develop peace-building skills. And they have been facilitating interchange and mutual learning so that all may give and receive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have been doing this because they have been following very carefully the words of one of their original founding leaders, Menno Simons, who said in 1539, and I quote:

True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful, it shelters the destitute, it serves those who harm it, it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all men.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, MCC Saskatchewan supports the global work. They have an annual budget of around \$2 million a year — all of which is raised locally. They have developed incredible community responses for disasters such as Hurricane Mitch; and they have as well as an international perspective, they have many important Saskatchewan programs.

And I would like to mention just a couple of them. One of them is a program called Aboriginal neighbours. This is a program that resulted specifically from recognizing that there has to be an attitude of mutuality between Mennonites and Aboriginal people. If I may again quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this time from an Australian Aboriginal elder. And I think that the quote from Australia applies equally well to Saskatchewan. Lila Watson said, quote:

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I think in a nutshell captures the essence of the work of MCC in Saskatchewan and around the world. They work and help people with mental health problems and disabilities. They work on gender issues. They work specifically on peace and restorative justice.

Most of us know the MCC because we know their thrift shops,

and we know their international job creation program called Ten Thousand Villages. We go there perhaps at Christmastime to buy various gifts from around the world. What we are doing when we do that is helping support their global job creation program that supports over twelve and a half thousand people.

I would like to say in closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what MCC Saskatchewan does is truly an embodiment of a quote that I would like to read to you from the *Bible* from Micah, chapter 6, verse 8.

and what does the LORD require of
you
but to do justice, and to love
kindness,
and to walk humbly with your
God?

I would ask all committee members to support Bill 301. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 18 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 302 — The Renaming of the Regina Golf Club Act

Clause 1

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's quite an opportunity actually to be able to speak to this Bill.

The Regina Golf Club has been a part of Regina for quite a number of years and right next to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police training academy and museum.

And after several years of working through the process, they have received the official designation of royal from London, from the palace in London, and it is now our opportunity to pass this Bill which will rename the Regina Golf Club officially and call it the Royal Regina Golf Club.

That will make it one of only five royal golf clubs in Canada. So quite a designation and quite a historic step for this golf club in Regina. It will probably draw some tourists to the city and I think will be a real plus for our city to have that right next to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) training academy and museum.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 303 – The Saskatchewan Roman Catholic
Dioceses Reorganization Act**

Clause 1

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure on my part today to sponsor this Bill. We had a very interesting discussion this morning in committee which I think all members quite enjoyed as we listened to how this Bill had come together over the last three years. Work on this began back in 1997.

And of course it involves a series of administrative issues, a great deal of the history of this province in terms of the development of the Roman Catholic Church and the fostering of various parishes throughout the province.

This Bill is primarily an administrative Bill. It brings current practices into a legal being, and I think it moves a long way towards providing a very strong foundation for the Roman Catholic Church to continue on in our province.

I am very happy that we are joined here by such distinguished guests today who have done so much work here and throughout the province to build support for this. And I would ask all members to support this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to make a few remarks in respect to the Bill at hand. We had opportunity this morning in the Private Members' Committee to look at all three of these Bills. And I'm very proud that members of our province have come this far in making sure that initiatives that have been put forward to work together more so in the province in a more expedient manner, and a manner that provides for the authorities at large to be able to do the work that they must do in order to basically take care of our people better.

And so I'm just wanting to put forward to the Roman Catholics of the province who were actually some of them wondering about this Bill and so on, that we had extensive questioning this morning in committee regarding the assets and liabilities of the specific dioceses in question. And that I was quite satisfied that there would be responsibility taken in these areas.

And so I too would like to just commend all the members of the Roman Catholic Diocese in Saskatchewan for their work. And I know that there will be new and wonderful things happening because of this sort of reorganization. So thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 13 inclusive agreed to.

Schedules A, B, C, and D agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 301 — The Mennonite Central
Committee Saskatchewan Act**

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 301, The Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Act be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 302 — The Renaming of The Regina Golf Club Act

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 302, The Renaming of The Regina Golf Club Act be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

**Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan Roman Catholic
Dioceses Reorganization Act**

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan Roman Catholic Dioceses Reorganization Act be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

District Health Care Budgets

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to initiate the debate on this very important topic today, because we're in the middle of a process that many people are finding fatally flawed. Madam Minister . . . Mr. Speaker, I apologize, I'm used to asking questions of the minister rather than having a discussion.

So, Mr. Speaker, in 1993 we initiated, not only in this province but across Canada and North America, a very important discussion about the future of health care and health care service delivery in our country and indeed in the western world. And Madam . . . Mr. Speaker, through that whole process, through that process there were some very, very important changes that happened in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the government at the time decided that they were going to go to a new model of health care service delivery that they called the wellness model. The wellness model is a very interesting terminology because it implies that if all is . . . all that you need to do is to treat people in a way that they will be well, they will stay well.

Well it isn't that simple, Mr. Speaker, and unfortunately the best laid intentions seem to get mislaid somewhere along the way.

Mr. Speaker, at the time, there were some radical changes to the

delivery of health care in Saskatchewan. And we were told at that time that these changes were going to be necessary in order that we could sustain the system. And there were all kinds of things that occurred at the time.

And there were quotes that were made, that said to the people of Saskatchewan, by way of advertisements and quotes in articles by the then minister of Health, Louise Simard, that basically committed to the people of Saskatchewan that if they complied and agreed with the changes that were being proposed at the time, that they could count on this system then to deliver services into the far future in a fair way to the people of the province.

And so they changed from the number of health districts there were, they eliminated many of the volunteer health boards that served their communities and their facilities very well over the years, and they went to the district health plan. And they said that these changes are going to be necessary and this medicine is going to be good for you.

They made the commitment to people in Saskatchewan that if they put up with all the facility closures that there were, and if they put up with the fact that instead of having a hospital many communities were only going to have a so-called health care facility, that that so-called health care facility was going to be there for them into the future, and that the system would be much more appropriate and would be sustainable in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, at the time there were even almost full page ads in the newspapers that were run, and, in my hand, I have one right now from April 3, in *The Leader-Post* of 1993. And the headline reads, "An important message to the people of Saskatchewan." And this is under the signature of the then Hon. Louise Simard, minister of Health at the time. And I'd like to quote some of the commitments that were made at that time to the people of this province. It said, and I quote:

We will ensure that all Saskatchewan residents continue to have access to acute and emergency services.

It went on to say that:

We will design a health care system that meets the needs of today and tomorrow.

It says:

We will build a health system that is more effective, responsive, efficient, and stronger than anything we might ever have thought possible.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here we are in the year 2000 and the system is not living up to those commitments. The system quite honestly is not living up, not only to those commitments, but to the expectations that were given and the promises that were made to the people of the province at that time.

And, Mr. Speaker, we simply cannot continue down the path that we currently are walking on if we're going to build a sustainable long-term health care system in this province.

I believe that the commitments that were made in 1993 were the kinds of commitments that should have been kept. And I don't think that this government has been able to live up to those commitments of keeping a sustainable, effective health care system that people could count on, not only for acute care but for long-term care. I don't think the commitments that were made have been lived up to for the health care workers who are struggling under unbelievable circumstances to deliver services.

Every day in this House we hear stories about people who are dramatically and drastically falling through the system, they're falling through the cracks in the system. And this is despite the best efforts of countless health care workers across this province who are doing their utmost in order to see that service delivery is happening and happening in an appropriate way.

Mr. Speaker, the commitments that were made are commitments that need to be lived up to. And this system and this process that we're going about aimlessly in the dark is simply, simply no longer meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people.

Every day it seems that I get calls from people who are feeling as if the system is failing them. I get calls from patients, clients, who say they can't access health care in a timely fashion. I get calls from medical professionals, from doctors and nurses, who feel the frustration of knowing what they need to do for their clients and patients, who know what kind of therapy and treatment is needed and appropriate but are so frustrated that they can't get it in a timely way, that the waiting times are far too long. They're the longest in the country.

Mr. Speaker, in recognizing those kinds of realities, the Saskatchewan Party, prior to this last election, said something needs to be done different. Before we can decide what that is specifically, we have to understand what's going on now.

We have to have a good sense of where the health care system is having some successes — as indeed it is — but also understand where its shortfalls are, to understand what the pluses and minuses of the equation are, to understand if the funding mechanisms, and the way funding is occurring, and the limitations and strings and the pools and the silos and all the types of preconditions that are on health care funding are appropriate.

We needed to see is there's an appropriate mix of spending on administration, and not just the administration who is a part of an administrative structure — the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and a couple of senior staff — but also all the issues surrounding what is required by the Department of Health by way of paperwork and statistics, and all the rest of it that front-line workers have to spend far too much of their time on administrative-type matters instead of providing health care, health care delivery at the beds.

What you want if you're sick is a nurse who's got the time to help you and nurse you back to wellness, not a bean-counter that wants a bunch of statistics about what's going on.

And I know you need to keep statistics. I know there's basic information that's required. But, Mr. Speaker, the consensus across this province clearly has been that the information is not

appropriate and is not timely.

Mr. Speaker, we proposed that this study of the health care system needed to be done. We called it an audit of the health care system. And we believed it had to be done in an independent way because we saw too far in the past, as this government has done, where you talk about an audit of no fault where you have a flawed process set up, or you review the Crowns and you have a flawed process set up. It had to be set up in such a way that it was beyond refute.

And we suggested that it should be done under the Office of the Provincial Auditor, not because it was solely going to be an exercise in bean-counting, but because it was going to be an exercise that had to be done in a way that nobody could question the integrity of the author and the way in which this thing was done.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we suggested . . . And I was actually quite pleased when I heard the minister firstly say that a review of the system was appropriate. I was pleased to hear when the Premier of the province said that this review should not only be in the province of Saskatchewan but should include the federal system right across Canada. Because I think the point has to be made that the federal government has indeed shirked and failed its responsibilities to participate financially and with a leadership role in the delivery of health care services in Canada.

You simply cannot pick the destination of the tour if you're only paying 10 or 12 cents on the dollar of the price of it, and the federal government is trying to do that without stepping up to the plate with appropriate financial support as well. And I do support that.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that we seem to be backing away from that. But more importantly, what I'm concerned about is we're engaging in a process of this current budget system and following up on past budget systems that quite simply have failed us. And they've put the district health boards in an untenable position.

The Department of Health is now directed, and we've documented that with copies of the correspondence that was signed by the deputy minister of Health, that has said a couple of important things to district health boards. They've said, you will come up with a plan by this date. And we hear from the minister that indeed district health boards have complied with that specific directive. And the minister is in receipt of their plans, and that's appropriate.

But she's also said that you will do this, and you will do it without comment. You will not be appropriate to disclose or to discuss with your communities what's in that plan. The minister has reserved that decision for herself and has said in this House that she intends to either approve the plan, to reject the plan, or modify the plan.

Well that's very good, Mr. Speaker, but where does the community fit into this? Mr. Speaker, it is very important that if you're going to change what services are given to a community, that the community has to be there at the beginning of the process, not at the end of it.

The community discussion has to happen with not only the community that the district serves, but it has to happen with the health care professionals that work in that system. It has to happen with the people that need the system. It has to happen with the community leaders who have to understand what the impacts of this change is going to be on their community and given an opportunity to suggest constructive possible alternatives.

But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, or just as importantly, it has to be done in a way that has an overall vision. Now the minister says, well what we're going to do when we get all these plans together, we're going to look at them in a provincial context to decide what's going to be approved, modified, or rejected.

But what is the vision? Where is the vision? Where is the commitment to the principles of health care reform that were laid down in 1993? Where is the commitment to provide acute care and long-term care health services to people right across this province in a logical, planned way?

This is simply a knee-jerk reaction without any long-term plan of where we're going, Mr. Speaker. And it is unfair, it is completely unfair for the minister and the department to insist that this is going to happen without that plan, and that district health boards are going to be forced to make their plans without a blueprint and a plan of where we're heading.

Mr. Speaker, at the recent SAHO convention, the SAHO members clearly gave to the minister what their key concerns are. And the first thing they said in a document that they submitted to the minister and circulated is that there has to be a recommitment to the fundamental principles of health care in this province. That's the first thing.

And they've also said that if you believe that we have to have a long-term plan as to how those services are delivered. And only then do you start dealing with the specifics of facility changes, closures, or readjustments.

Only then — after you have, number one, an understanding of what's going on, a complete analysis of the system; number two, a clear vision of where you're going — only then should you be talking to the communities about possible changes to their communities. And only finally after that whole process is completed in an open and honest and transparent way, do you consider closing facilities.

But, Mr. Speaker, the government's got it backwards. Instead of having a plan, we have no plan. They still ride on the coattails of their legend of Tommy Douglas and health care. That's not good enough in the 21st century, Mr. Speaker. It simply is not good enough.

We've got to deal with the situation that's going on in health care today and into the future — not 50 or 75 years ago — because times have changed, and yes, things are different.

Mr. Speaker, our motion today turns that around in at least a small way and says clearly that before you're going to close facilities, before you're going to initiate changes that are dramatically going to affect communities, you have to do a

couple of simple things firstly.

You have to, number one, remove the gag order that's on district health boards so they can discuss this with their communities and their health care professions before it happens; and number two, you have to make sure that what you do is you reverse the process — that you do the consultation and the discussion with communities before you impose a final health care plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the full picture. But I've tried to outline what I think that the Saskatchewan Party believes is going to be the direction needed in health care. We need to provide leadership. We need to provide direction. We need to make a plan. We need to make a commitment to the people of this province that is sustainable in the long term. And that's going to mean change — that's a certainty — but we have to do it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move, seconded by the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, the following motion:

That this Assembly urges the Minister of Health to change the budgeting process in Saskatchewan health districts to allow for consultation with the public and health care staff after the health plans are submitted to the government but prior to the final approval of health care budgets by the minister, and that all gag orders against health care districts during the budget process be lifted.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the motion.

This is the government that gave us our current health care system. Seven years ago, when Health minister Louise Simard brought in the NDP's wellness plan, she said it would ensure the future of health care in the province, that the system would continue to give us access to acute and emergency services.

This of course we have failed to see. What we have seen is the closure of 52 rural hospitals and the loss of service in many, many communities.

The NDP said that the new system would consolidate services and save money, yet what do we hear today? We hear that they need more money, that they can't offer the services that they were providing at that time.

There was anger, frustration, and concern from many rural areas. What little public input was allowed fell on deaf ears. The NDP's ruthless quest to reform health care in the province left communities with no time to prepare, and after the closures, they were left with limited access to immediate or acute care.

And the health boards. The health boards have had a gag order from day one. I have talked to health care board members who had to sign forms confirming that they would keep confidential what went on in their meetings.

I thought that health boards were to represent the people, not

the government. The health boards have been the fall guys for this government. The government has deflected all the blame onto them, and what little credit there has been in the last seven years, they have been there to gladly take it.

The health boards, Mr. Speaker, were bought off with a promise of being well paid and having power to do what was right in their constituencies. But I'd like to ask the health boards today, Mr. Speaker: was the pay enough for the heat that they had to take for this government?

And, Mr. Speaker, what power did they really have? Behind the scenes we had government bureaucrats telling them and giving direction of what should happen in their health districts.

This spring the Regina Health District put into process a budget and service consultation process for staff and the general public. Meetings were held and questionnaires were handed out.

I'd like to read one portion of the questionnaire given to the staff of the Regina Health District which I find rather alarming. It has to do with revenue and asking the staff how they can generate revenue.

And I quote — it's from the Regina Health District budget and service consultation process staff input questionnaire, and under the questions, under (a) they have revenues. The questions are, first:

Are there opportunities to generate revenue in your department? Please list how.

The second question is:

Do you know (how any opportunities outside your) of any opportunities outside your department to generate revenue? Please list.

We now have a situation where our health district is asking the staff to generate revenue to keep the hospital going.

On the next page, we have a question and it is under service delivery. And the question is:

To better balance our budget, what activities or services could we stop doing or do differently?

Does this sound like two-tiered health care? I was with the understanding that we had medicare in Saskatchewan — accessible, affordable health care for all.

Following this consultation and questionnaire, there was a further meeting held. At this meeting the results were given that laid out what the staff had come up with — good ideas, good plans of how they could see things working better in the Regina Health District.

There originally was a plan that after this was given out to the staff and to the public, that there would be another step where the staff and the public would have a chance to further discuss before the final implementation and given . . . and before it was given to the Minister of Health. However the minister put a gag order on this, and this step was eliminated.

So the submission process became this: that on Thursday, May 11 the Regina Health District Board met and finalized their strategic plan; and on May 15, that plan and budget was given to the minister. Then following approval from the minister in June, the board would release an approved strategic plan and budget at an annual general meeting.

There is no mention of further consultation with the public or the staff by the Regina Health District.

The 32 health districts that have been established to handle local health care in their areas were given little direction and even less choice as to what they could and could not do. These local boards, made up of appointed and elected officials, were supposed to be autonomous. At least that's what Louise Simard kept telling them in 1993.

Over the years, we have watched this system deteriorate to the point of no return. There is no turning back, and this NDP government has no idea how to move forward. Seven years after the NDP implemented their wellness plan, we have the longest waiting list in the country. Our surgery waiting lists have ballooned to one, two, or even three waits.

Our front-line services are suffering. Many doctors have either left or retired, and their numbers continue to decrease. The NDP were told about an impending nursing shortage a number of years ago, and true to form refused to address this very critical issue. What was their response? Cut the number of seats in the nursing program. That's a good way to increase the number of nurses in this province.

What has really happened is that we have ended up with an unhappy workforce. We have ended up with nurses going on strike, and even after the strike, what has changed in the workforce? Have the conditions improved? We have spoken to many nurses, Mr. Speaker, and support staff. The situation is as bad or worse than it was before the nurses' strike.

Operating rooms and intensive care units are under stress and some are closing. We have a situation in Regina, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where an operating room has been closed. How is this going to alleviate waiting lists?

Equipment is being shut down. The list goes on. Now there is the threat of cutting support staff in order to balance the budgets. On speaking to staff at the . . . in Regina, they are very concerned about this. The RNs (Registered Nurse) are very concerned that the support staff is going to be cut because they need these people in order to operate on a daily basis. They provide functions which enable the nursing staff to continue on and do the necessary work that they have to do. Without them, they believe that there'd be great jeopardy in keeping all the wards open in Regina if the support staff is closed.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, there does not seem to be any recognition of how important the unit clerks are, the admitting clerks, the porters, the LPNs (licensed practical nurse), the lab techs, and security. How important this support staff is to the running of the hospitals in Regina, Saskatoon, and all across this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party believes that we need to keep the staff and find a way to help them work together to give

better, accessible health care to all citizens of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, home care is our next concern. And it is also moving now to privatization. We used to have home care which was accessible to people all across this province. And, Mr. Speaker, we now find out that people are being told that home care is no longer going to be accessible for them. The whole plan was that we would take people out of long-term care, give them a better quality of life so that they could stay in their own homes. They were going to . . . we were going to have the best home care system in the world. What do we find, Mr. Speaker? We find now that this government is moving to take away this much-needed home care and is forcing people to find alternative measures.

Mr. Speaker, there does not seem to be any understanding by this government that people cannot afford private care. They cannot afford to find their own personal care. And yet in this province we have been led to believe for years that we have a medicare system that looks after people. There is no problem. Everyone will have accessible, affordable health care when they need it and for whatever they need. Now today we don't have that.

What good is free medicare if you can't access it when and how you need it? It doesn't do you any good two years later or when you're dead. That's the whole issue in this province. We just keep on waiting and waiting.

Mr. Speaker, this government is totally out of touch with the people of Saskatchewan and the reality that health care is failing many individuals and families. They are suffering daily under a mismanaged health care system that is totally controlled by a government who has forgotten what health care is all about.

The people of Saskatchewan want to know where is their money and where is their health care dollars going? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the idea of a gag order is more of the inflated language that we're coming to expect from across the floor. The notion of a gag order is no more than a figment of some highly-imaginative, questionable imagination that appears to be little more than pathetic, partisan attempt to gain a few points.

These cheap shots demean a sensitive and thoughtful process of developing an overall health care plan for this province. As the Health minister clearly pointed out several times during question period, it would be premature to begin talking about district health care plans before they are seen and understood in their context. And that context is the overall health care plan for the province.

The district boards have been encouraged throughout this process to become involved. A number of districts were asked for public input during the development of their health plans. The Regina Health District ran advertisements asking for public input. Public meetings were held. Doing the job for which they had been elected and appointed, the district boards then put their plans together and submitted them to the Health minister.

(1515)

As the minister and the department assess each of the district plans in the light of an overall plan for this province, some of them will be approved, some may need revisions. It would be premature, thoughtless, and unwise to put district plans out to the public before they were reviewed and assessed in the light of the overall plan. It would create unnecessary anxiety.

For example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, imagine that the health district of gloom and doom developed a plan based on their traditional belief that nothing changes for the better. They said two of their five hospitals and one of their nursing homes were going to have to close and 90 jobs were going to have to be eliminated.

If they put that plan out into the public, people would be very frightened and terribly upset. Along with their MLA, one of the leading citizens of doom and gloom, they would probably attack the district board, the Health minister, and the government. And who would want that? Not only would a process like that cause unnecessary fear and chaos, it would be destructive.

The wisdom of our current process, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it seeks together all the data and make recommendations before finally confirming and approving the plans. You see, in our imaginary scenario what the people of gloom and doom health district didn't know was that the district right next door, new visions health district, was developing a plan that included transforming two of their hospitals into health centres or wellness centres and developing a home dialysis program and hiring a new specialist in gerontology.

With these new services available so close to home and with recommendations of coordination from the Minister of Health, gloom and doom would be able to keep their nursing home, transform one of their hospitals into a health centre, and they would not have to fire all the staff that they had said they were going to have to fire in their preliminary plans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a responsible and thoughtful and caring government would never allow the public to face that kind of chaos and fear. This government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will never . . . this government will never engage in that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government will never engage in the Henny Penny, sky-is-falling model of strategic planning that is proposed by the hon. member from Melfort.

Gag order? I don't think so. In contrast to the kind of callous, uncaring government implied in the motion, our Health minister and our government has engaged and will continue to engage in a thoughtful, consultative process. A process that involves the districts and where the districts involve their citizens.

Once these plans are reviewed and the districts have been given approval to go ahead, it will be more productive to have further public discussion. In the real world of strategic planning, it is more productive to discuss fact than fantasy, especially the

nightmares that we get coming across the floor.

The fact is that districts have worked with their communities to identify the needs of their residents. They have put forward plans designed to best meet the needs within the resources available. Once these plans have been reviewed within a provincial framework, communities will be able to participate in planning for health services. This will be productive and meaningful consultation to ensure that health needs are looked after.

Despite all the very real difficulties in providing the high level of health care that Saskatchewan people have come to expect, despite the significant cuts in federal support for health care, as the hon. member from Melfort mentioned, Saskatchewan continues to lead the country in its ability to provide overall good health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Working with the districts in a thoughtful, consultative manner, we will continue to provide that high level of care. The plans and proposals developed by district boards must fit into the overall plan for health care in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our health care budget is the highest ever in the history of our province. Despite those federal cutbacks in health funding, we have kept our budget up there. At 5.9 per cent higher than last year's budget, it is the second highest per capita health budget in this nation — second highest in the nation per capita. Only Manitoba spends more per capita, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Our health care system is providing more service and more care than it has ever done throughout our history. Still we know that with thoughtful, careful planning and new vision we will be able to do even more in the months and years ahead.

In his speech to the forum on medicare, May 11, our Premier talked about that very hopeful new vision.

He said:

With respect to the overall goals of the system, much greater emphasis must be placed on improving the health of people by taking action on the determinants of health care which include the socio-economic environment; the physical environment; biology and genetic endowment; early childhood development, and personal health practices.

In this regard (he said) we need to find the right balance between investments in health services and in health determinants, between treating illness and preventing illness, between responding to the very deeply felt desire on the part of citizens to have a responsive and effective treatment system, and a much less acute but no less important need to think long term and to think about the population as a whole as well as about individuals.

Of course this is easier said than done particularly in an environment where costs of treating illness alone are rising much faster than the growth in government revenues. But we must make choices if we are going to attain this vision.

It is in this context, the context of this overall vision for health care in Saskatchewan that the district plans must be developed, evaluated, and approved. Doing anything less, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be a reckless abandonment of the trust we have inherited — the trust to continue to develop and make our health care system the very best that it could possibly be, a model for this nation and for this world, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — As we continue to develop this system we will continue to implement the concepts of wellness and prevention. We have much to do as we develop a sound primary health care system. We need to ensure that the entire population is served — rural, urban, suburban, inner city, middle class, and marginalized. We need to ensure that we are maximizing the use of the skills of all members of the health care team including highly skilled physicians and nurses who are so often the first point of contact within this system.

There is much innovative work that has already been done in co-operation with some of the districts and more possibilities will be explored. Good ideas and solid plans will be implemented. Working together with the districts we will develop a sustainable medicare system for the new millennium.

It is for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that I speak against the motion and make the following amendment. I move the following amendment:

That we delete all the words after “Minister of Health to” and add the words “continue a budgeting system in Saskatchewan that will ensure the future of medicare.”

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, obviously, as we’ve witnessed this afternoon, medicare is a very hot topic in Saskatchewan.

Governments created medicare, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we are held responsible for this vision — a vision of the health care system that provides universal, accessible health care on the basis of need and not income; a vision began in Saskatchewan and today strongly held by all Canadians.

The very first proposal for medicare was put forward by Tommy Douglas in 1945. A plan to cover the cost of both hospital and general medical care was turned down, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of cost and other provinces were not comfortable with it.

This rejection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, forced Saskatchewan in 1947 to implement a smaller version of hospitalization for the province of Saskatchewan. This modest plan, Mr. Speaker, was well accepted by other provinces. They looked on it with envy. And 10 years later hospitalization was extended throughout Canada by the federal government using a cost-shared financing

as incentive. Provincial innovation and experimentation combined with leadership produced a positive outcome for all Canadians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when this program was first conceived and thought of, Tommy Douglas envisioned it in steps and in stages. The initial innovations weren’t it and that’s it, it was done in stages. And in 1962, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan took the next step and introduced a more broadly based initiative called medicare.

Medicare, Mr. Speaker, was 50/50 cost shared with the federal government, and in 1968 medicare became a national program. And wouldn’t we love that today, Mr. Deputy Speaker — 50/50 cost share.

Canadians see this health system publicly funded and publicly administered as their right and the right of every Canadian. The gaps in health status between rich and poor have been shrunk. We no longer have those huge gaps between our health . . . between rich and poor people. Universal quality care, accessible to all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — The legacy of Canadians — this single-payer Canadian system achieving better outcomes for smaller percentage share of our country’s wealth. We receive better outcomes, lower overall costs, and a fair distribution of benefits based on needs rather than dollars.

In the early 1990s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, huge debt was throughout Canada, both in Saskatchewan and federally. Health costs at this time were also rising and that, Mr. Speaker, put pressure on governments to really take a serious look at these systems and make them become more efficient. New models of health care delivery were looked at and scrutinized.

During this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we asked ourselves many questions. Was our system a health care system, medicare, or were we purely looking after illness and not really progressing any farther? Spending had increased over 50 per cent in the previous 20 years, and we realized that we could not deal any longer and continue with this system that dealt only with sickness and looking after illness.

We needed to provide more infrastructure and financial support for illness prevention as well as health protection and prevention. Wellness, Mr. Deputy Speaker — an overall comprehensive outlook and integrated health care delivery within the regions of the province.

And so came our health districts, Mr. Speaker. Districts that coordinated services delivering health care along with a wellness continuum. Prevention programs, treatment services, long-term care, home and community-based services, health centres, as well as the traditional hospital services.

Wellness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to deal with wellness, we need health policies that not only address the individual but also address the larger environment in which we live.

The changes that took place in the early ’90s have been difficult

ones, Mr. Speaker. And in any system where we deal with human beings and the needs and wants of humans, we will make mistakes; we will need to continually adjust and re-evaluate the system.

(1530)

And as human beings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're never very accepting of change. Any changes need to be proven before attitudes and opinions are willing to accept. Before we develop acceptance and adopt a new outlook on how we deliver these services they have to be proven in many cases. Even with the change, our system remains top quality.

Budgeting also in this time had to adjust for these new changes. No longer did we have the ability to just throw dollars at problems in various areas throughout the province. We had to look at the way we manage these systems and the way we provide the needs of people of Saskatchewan. Services need to be consistent throughout the province and accessible also for everyone.

Each health district, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is independent. To address the needs of its residents it has to be. But also each health district is tied to each other in the whole system that provides consistent health care throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, when I think of the problem and the questions that we've received over the last week, I keep thinking of at home. I can picture sitting at home at the kitchen table and my husband says, well I'd like a new truck. And I say, well gee, I'd like to renovate the house. And one of the kids says, well I'd like a new computer; and the other one says, well I'd like a cell phone and a new snowboard.

And you think, now does everyone just run out and do whatever they want? No, Mr. Speaker. As a family and as a family unit we have an obligation to sit down and decide. Do I want to save for retirement? Do I want my children to go to university? Do I want to plan the whole situation that my family will be in?

I can't make promises and make no plans. And we can't act on an individual basis. We must sit down, we must work within the resources that we have to provide the best that we can for the whole family unit.

We have to weigh the wants and the needs, the priorities and the necessities, but we also have to take into consideration our resources. Final decisions have to be made on these resources and we have to be . . . we have to address the current needs and what they are; what we need that's immediate. But we also have to foresee the future and plan for the future and the needs we will need and the upcoming emergencies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the health districts and the health services within this province have to operate on the same principle. They have to find a balance with which to function within: between investment in health services and investment in health determinants; between treating illness and preventing illness; between responding to the very deeply felt desire of citizens to have a responsive and effective treatment system and a much less acute, but no less important, need to think long-term. And to think about the population as a whole as well as about

individuals.

Many questions have been asked over the last few weeks and years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since many of these changes have begun. And, Mr. Speaker, there has been many changes and we're not finished yet. The world is changing, more technologies, everything in the health care system changes faster than it almost seems like anywhere else in society.

How do we ensure that the entire population is served both rural and urban, inner city and suburban, middle class and marginalized? And how do we ensure that we are maximizing the use of the skills of all members of the health care team?

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the way the budgeting has changed for the health districts, I truly believe that it works the same as a family. Each district has individual needs that they must address for their residents and their specific areas. But those whole plans must fit into the provincial scheme and the provincial family of medical services that are offered to our residents.

Mr. Speaker, it has to be done, it has to be done in a concise manner. And I agree with the Minister of Health and the Department of Health, and I stand to support the amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to enter into the debate on the motion put forward today and to the amendment.

Mr. Chair, it has been stated over and over again by many people in this province, district board members as well as community members, that they are expressing some grave concern about the way the health reform situation is taking place.

Mr. Chair, one of the main concerns of district boards is that they have not had a say when it comes to putting forward a plan for their district. Even in the past when they have made decisions or come to some idea of what they need as a plan, oftentimes the Minister of Health and this government, this NDP government, has seen to it that hacks from the Department of Health enter into meetings at the district board level and certainly give some very serious indication that they will do it the government's way or no way.

And so that really does not give autonomy and decision making to the people at the local level.

How in the world can this government say that they are respecting the views, the thoughts, and the ideas of people in a district to direct their own destiny by putting forward a plan that's suitable for them, when in fact the ministry of Health is ensuring that there's someone from the government level, basically some of the bureaucrats, coming forward to tell them exactly what they must do, not what they need to do.

Mr. Chair, one of the other things that has been brought forward through the past seven years is the concern on the part of community members and district board members that

governments simply get their way to move forward with their idea of health reform by cutting funding and squeezing funding on different facilities and in different ways, so that again the health boards have no way that they can possibly go ahead with plans that are necessary for their specific district.

The lack of adequate funding to health districts has left nearly two-thirds of them in deficit positions. Deficits that now total over \$50 million, Mr. Chair.

We now have the taxpayers of Saskatchewan paying one-third more into health funding and having many, many more services slashed. So of course people are not buying the argument that just because there's more funding going in, that this is a better health care system. We obviously have a scenario at hand where, whether there's more money going in or not, services are being slashed.

So I ask this government, Mr. Chair, is it this government's intention to move towards privatization — yes, it is. And we have seen it in spades.

Mr. Chair, what has happened over the past two or three years have been clear, have been very clear, because privatization of health services has already taken place in many ways and form.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Julé: — For instance, Mr. Chair, we have had constituents in my constituency that have come out of hospital, who have previously been receiving home care, come out of hospital in Saskatoon, and have been told at the district level that there is no more room for them in the publicly funded inn. So what they must do now is get into a private care home, regardless of whether they can afford this or not.

Mr. Chair, this has been going on. I have a number of instances where people have been told that their home care services are being cut down to a minimum number of hours. And when these people that need to have this care and their families point out that it's impossible for these patients to take care of themselves, they are simply told, well you are just going to have to. Some family members have had to quit jobs in order to take care of their family members.

How in goodness . . . how in the . . .

An Hon. Member: — In the world.

Ms. Julé: — I guess how in the world — thank you very much — how in the world would can we justify saying then that this is a publicly funded system? That this government is moving towards home care services that are expanded. In fact that is not happening, and it is no use for them to continue to deny this day in and day out.

The district health boards that are faced with an increased lack of funding have been left with no choice but to make some very tough decisions. Whether it was staff programs or services, the bottom line, Mr. Chair, was that many rural residents paid the ultimate price.

There are health boards throughout the province that have

expressed their concerns to the NDP government, with the lack of funding they're experiencing. They have repeatedly said that they cannot continue to maintain their staffing or service levels if funding continues to decrease.

Seven years after the health reform was inducted in this province, services are still not being consolidated. We have not saved money. And more importantly, rural residents continue to bear the brunt of this so-called wellness plan, as more and more of our hospitals continue to close or are converted in regional health facilities.

Mr. Chair, at this point I would like to make clear to the Assembly my concern about what might happen in the Central Plains Health District. This district has been given the approval to go ahead with the planning of their health facility — a new health facility.

And so we have plans being undertaken as far as the engineering goes and the plans for . . . the architectural plans for this facility. However, it doesn't seem to make sense for that to go ahead without knowing what kind of services we are going to end up having in the Central Plains Health District as far as a regional hospital in Humboldt.

Certainly, I'm sure that the district health board has put forward their plan, as other health boards have put forward theirs, by May 15. And I'm certainly hoping that the Health minister will acquiesce to giving the credit to these people who have worked so very hard to maintain the services that we have at hand.

If in fact the government of the day does not intend to do that, it is my sincere hope and wish that they would come forward and just simply tell our district as well as the people in Humboldt and the surrounding area that, yes, we have had . . . say to you clearly that you will not have the same services; that you will be having a downgraded facility.

If in fact the same services that are in place are to be ensured by this government, I would hope that they'd tell them clearly about that because there is a great deal of planning as far as revenue coming forward for the funding of this facility. Many private donors are putting forward money and would like to know just what they are going to end up with here.

Mr. Chair, I would like to touch a little bit on accessibility. The Minister of Health has said time and time again that she's so very proud that accessibility is one of the things granted to people in this province. Well that is completely without founding as far as I'm concerned . . . without any foundation, rather.

Accessibility has for a long time been a great problem. People in rural areas do not have good accessibility to hospitals, to the health care practitioners that they need, and to services that they require.

There is another problem with the minister mentioning that there is great accessibility. And I think that problem has been shown very clearly in this House as the members of the opposition have put forward a number of petitions asking for reliable cellular service in the rural areas of this province.

We have inadequate tower systems in this province. Many EMT (emergency medical technician) service providers have indicated to us that they can't even relay an emergency message as they are trying to transport patients or as they are trying to pick up patients from certain centres. How can we say that accessibility is in good shape in this province? It certainly is not.

This year's budget, health budget, Mr. Chair, saw a paltry \$17 million allocated for health care. That amount, as everyone knows, will not cover very much, let alone the serious deficit situation facing our health districts.

True to form the NDP blame all that is wrong with health care in Saskatchewan on the federal government. If the NDP don't like what they see when they look at health care in the province, they should look in the mirror. This is their wellness plan, not anyone else's. This is their legacy.

This year, Mr. Chair, will see health districts faring no better than in previous years. Faced with decreasing funding, they've been told to make do and to make whatever decisions have to be made to ensure that they meet their budget. On top of that, the Health minister has ordered all district boards to submit their annual budget and subsequent plan for service to her for her approval.

We will see how that ends up panning out, Mr. Chair. I am sure that there are going to be a great number of modifications in some of the plans the health districts put forward, much to their dismay.

Thank you.

(1545)

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of interest I enter into this debate on health care. It started out, Mr. Speaker, with the members of the opposition making accusations about the Minister of Health putting a gag order on health boards, Mr. Speaker. That's the furthest thing from the truth.

The government and the members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, are the founders of medicare in this country, the founders of medicare in this nation, Mr. Speaker. And we are the protectors of medicare.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate something that should be obvious to the members opposite but they have some difficulty understanding. And it's something that's very simple, Mr. Speaker — that in this province with this government in power, we will always have a publicly owned, publicly operated, and publicly funded health care system. Not like the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. We'll always have a publicly funded system, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, as with any system — as with any system — it needs to be reviewed periodically. And, Mr. Speaker, that's what's going on in the health system across this country, not just in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at a health care system that was developed and put in place in the 1940s, Mr. Speaker, and has gradually evolved.

But even when that first health care system was put in place by Tommy Douglas and an NDP administration in this province, Mr. Speaker, it was identified then that we would have to move to a second stage of medicare, Mr. Speaker.

And that would be a model of wellness, one that looked more closely at the determinants of health care, that focused on dealing with those determinants, and trying to make our society and its people more healthy to avoid some of the difficulties or interchanges with the health system, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, they don't want to talk about building a 21st century health care system. They don't want to have a vision for the future, Mr. Speaker. They want to have Bill 11 with Alberta. That's what they want, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if you're talking about visions for the future in health care, they talk about doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker. That's all we hear about — all this doom, the gloom, all the bad things — that they just can't seem to talk about anything positive.

Mr. Speaker, that's the same as putting Roundup on your lawn and expecting it to grow. If you all talk about the negative, you don't want to nourish anything, you don't want to build anything, you don't have any vision, you put Roundup on your lawn and you don't let it grow, Mr. Speaker.

They don't understand that in order to build something, you need to work at it. You need to develop it. You need to nourish it. You need to build it, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of interest that I saw the member from Canora-Pelly stand up the other day and thank the doctors, the nurses, and the health care system for providing him quality care, Mr. Speaker — the member opposite. He stood up in this House and told about the quality care he received in the General Hospital, Mr. Speaker.

The member said the good care he got, and the next day the members opposite are criticizing the system time and time again, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing that they can't look beyond what's in front of them and look to the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we need to talk about a vision for the future, and our Premier has talked about this vision many, many times across the country.

First we have to take on the determinants of health care, Mr. Speaker. We need to understand what's causing the illnesses in our society and look at ways to look at dealing with those issues in a more preventive mode of way.

Secondly, we need to improve the organization of our health care delivery system, not just in Saskatchewan but right across Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Thirdly, we need to commit, as a government, to renovating our health care system. And we have done that, Mr. Speaker. We in this province started in 1995 determining where our health care system had to go in the future, Mr. Speaker. We're not worried about living in the past. We're not living in a world of doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker. We're looking towards the future.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're doing that every day, consulting with those stakeholders in the health care system.

Now we hear the members opposite tell us what the Living Sky Health District was saying about their home care plan, and then the next day the minister comes and reads a letter from the CEO of the district saying that isn't so, Mr. Speaker.

And then we hear about this problem, we hear about that problem, Mr. Speaker. And then day after day we have to correct those facts, Mr. Speaker. There's obviously some difficulty in getting the facts as we need to deal with the real problems in health care, Mr. Speaker.

A point in fact, Mr. Speaker, one day in this House we heard about a bat infestation in the Regina General Hospital. And the next day, Mr. Speaker, we find out that it's no more than a figment of an imagination, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with real problems not bats. We need to deal with the health care system for the future, Mr. Speaker. And we need to deal with the real issues that face health care in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in building a health care system for the future we need to look at many, many things. But I want to point out a few things that the members opposite may not be aware, or tend to ignore, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan spends the second largest amount per capita on health care spending of any province in this country, Mr. Speaker. The second largest amount.

And, Mr. Speaker, even during the years that we were dealing with the Tory debt of the 1980s at its greatest point, when we were dealing with that debt, Mr. Speaker, each and every year this government increased health care spending, Mr. Speaker. Each and every year we put more money into health care, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, this health care system without doubt, and others from outside this province say regularly — it's the number one health care system in the country, and Canada provides the best health care system in the entire world, Mr. Speaker. And that's done in this country and by this government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we tend to want to look to a bright future and we want to build a new and innovative health care system for the 21st century that deals with wellness, Mr. Speaker, that has a vision for the future and isn't dealing with the negative doom and gloom of the past.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The time has elapsed, members. We have a 10-minute period for questions, comments and presumably answers to questions.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hopefully more than presumably answers, we'd like some real answers.

My question is to the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. The whole issue is on whether there's a gag order on the health districts. And I have a letter here from the South East Health District. We met with them, they'd forwarded a letter to us saying that very, very thing. And I just want to quote a couple

of statements right from the letter that they sent to the Health minister. And I quote:

Further to what you have directed, that public and staff consultation should not occur until the department has approved our plan. No public consultation, no staff consultation.

It goes on further in this very letter from the South East Health District, quoting what your minister has directed to them. It says:

We're very concerned by the specific instructions that changes (what we) that we are incorporating into our health plan not to be discussed with our public or our staff until these changes . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I just want to remind all hon. members the tradition here in this segment is for roughly one minute questions, and answers roughly the same length of time. The hon. member has been just over a minute and I would urge that you go straight to a question.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. How can you say that these statements are not a gag order on the health districts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — I want to thank the member very much for his question. I'm sure the member knows quite well that when you're developing a business plan — and that's technically what this is — and that each health district operates for its own members and residents, but also operates within the larger plan of the health family within Saskatchewan.

Now the member has always . . . or heard this week the answers from the minister to this question. But I would be sure . . . or be quite happy to reiterate and repeat them for him.

Now the wording in the letter was "should not occur;" it was not "would not occur." That it is a suggestion and that they approve any changes to ensure that they fit into the broad provincial strategy.

The hon. member would know that likely the very things that the people on this side talked about in their comments during the debate was that you cannot make promises until the total plan is looked at for the province. Each health district is part and parcel of the total plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question for the hon. member for Humboldt. Every day of the year the government considers a whole range of policy options, a whole range of possibilities, and we announce decisions when they are made.

Now are you arguing in this motion that government in all areas should make public every suggestion before it, every possibility, every alternative. Or do you agree with me that it is far more logical, it makes far more sense, for government to

announce decisions? Do you agree with me that it would only create hysteria and chaos and misinformation to throw out there things that are not government policy, are not the plan? But when there is a plan that is adopted, then the people of Saskatchewan need to know what that plan is. But to throw it out when it isn't policy, when it isn't the plan, would just cause confusion.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the member opposite, I would just like to say there is already chaos in this province over the health care system.

There is extreme chaos and the reason there is chaos, to the member from North Battleford, is simply because people have been promised that there would be consultation. They haven't been given the guarantee or the ability or right to take part in consultation that's meaningful.

There are numerous instances where boards in this province have clearly told us, on this side of the House at least, that they have not been able to put forward their agenda within their budget simply because the Health department sends someone to their district board meetings to kibosh basically all of their plans and to cut their funding where they should feel that it's necessary.

Now if the province has a plan, I would suggest that the province puts it forward. If you're planning on amalgamating health districts now, let people know so that they know what's happening and they can forward plans that are appropriate. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is to the member from Qu'Appelle Valley.

The Health budget has gone from \$1.5 billion in 1991 to 1.97 billion this year. That's a 33 per cent increase. And the net result of that has been 53 hospital closures including the closure of the newest hospital in Regina, the Plains.

We have the longest surgery waiting lists in Canada. People cannot access long-term care. Home care is being denied to needy patients. And the people of Saskatchewan have to go outside of this province to get health care. Even Tommy Douglas left this province to live elsewhere.

The people of Saskatchewan need more than just NDP rhetoric about health care. We need real health care services. When will that member support a health care system that includes real access to timely medical services that are currently being denied to people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our health care system has . . . we have put more money into that health care system every year. That's right. And we have provided and continue to provide a higher level of service in so many areas.

There are more visits, more consultations with family physicians, more nursing home residents. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have continued to provide new and better facilities; we have

continued to provide new and better equipment. We are doing more cataract surgeries, more hip replacements, more knee replacements. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a model health care system for this nation and for this world and we will continue to make that even better within the resources that we have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is for the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy. I've heard her speaking about how they're going to help keep staff and retain staff and improve health care. But I have a two-part question.

How does the member intend to retain staff and improve health care if the plan on that side of the House was no increase during the last election? As well as, the Leader of the Opposition has been telling Ottawa to withhold public funding for health care for the provinces. That's the first part.

And the second one I'd like a commitment from that member, does she support the principles of the Canada Health Act or does she support privatized health care?

(1600)

Ms. Bakken: — I'd be happy to answer the question. First of all, I'll answer the last question first. Do we support the Canada Health Act? Yes, we do. And on this side of the House we would endorse it by providing accessibility which is a key point in the Canada Health Act, which we do not have in this province today.

We do not have accessibility to health care. We have health care but what good does it do if it's not accessible.

Mr. Speaker, our leader never, ever said that we would cut health care spending in this province. What we are calling for is an audit of the system to find out where the money is and to put redirected dollars to add to our health care in this province instead of throwing it in the wind and then saying, why don't we have good health care. There is no desire by the government opposite to find out where the health care dollars are and to improve the service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like . . . It seems to me that the member from Humboldt objects to the approval process of the board's budget by the Department of Health.

I would like to ask the member from Humboldt, how large a cheque — in the good old Tory fashion — would she write to a district health board without the right to review and approve the board's budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Health boards have already looked at their needs. They have done needs assessments. They have been guaranteed in that district by the Minister of Health that they would enjoy the same services that they already are enjoying right now.

Based on that and that assurance from the minister, if they put forward their plan, we would expect then that no conversation that has been given to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The time has expired, members.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 7 — Regionally Based Programming by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak today to a motion which I think is both timely and extremely important to our province today. The motion concerns the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and changes that are being made . . . or being considered by the CBC board of directors and Mr. Rabinovitch that will I think have a very adverse impact on our community and on our province as a whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin by saying, this morning I had a chance to review some of the comments Mr. Rabinovitch made to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons that had invited him to appear and speak to them. I was concerned by the approach that Mr. Rabinovitch had made.

The argument that he is putting forward is that CBC in its current form cannot continue. CBC in its form, as it is licensed by the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), as its operating and broadcasting licence requires it to, cannot continue. And that this is . . . that as a result we need to make significant changes, and changes in particular in the way regional broadcasting and regional programming are made.

Mr. Rabinovitch this morning told the House of Commons, and to quote, "Without fundamental change we (we being the CBC) will slide into oblivion."

I agree, and I think all members agree in this Assembly, that change within the national broadcasting system can be a positive. What we do not agree with is that by neutering the CBC's regional arm, by going forward and removing regional programming by diminishing the approach that is currently in place that we will not have the same ability, the same ability and the same access to national broadcasting that we do today.

CBC is an important part of our culture. It's an important part of Canada. It is part of what reflects back who we are as Canadians. And I think that perhaps now, as we have gone through a navel-gazing exercise over the last 15 years certainly constitutionally to figure out and better define what is in fact Canadian, I find it interesting that in the midst of this now, we have the CBC entering into the foray with an approach which basically centralizes its view of Canada, not only in Ontario, but quite frankly in downtown Toronto.

I think many of us who have been to Toronto have certainly been awed and impressed by the beauty of the CBC National Broadcast Centre sitting down there, I think it's on John Street, right across from the Sky Dome and the convention centre. A remarkable, beautiful building.

But that is not what the CBC is. The CBC is a reflection of who we are. It is a reflection of national priority, not simply in downtown Toronto which clearly is the corporate centre of this nation, but it has to reflect Canadians across this country.

And what we're starting to see is unfortunately, I think a very narrow perspective of what this broadcasting corporation is about. It concerns me to a certain extent as we watch how Canada defines itself and the sort of national icons that we attach ourselves to.

I find it interesting that a couple of weeks ago, as I think members of this Assembly will know, Bob Homme died. Mr. Homme of course was, as we all know him, the Friendly Giant. And I was surprised by the way Canadians, particularly Canadians in my generation responded to this.

This was a program, a piece of cultural pabulum to be honest, as children that we grew up on. And it somehow very profoundly struck people with the death of this gentleman who for so many years, nearly 30 years, had been coming into our homes as Canadian entertainment. This is something successive generations of children grew up on.

Today I wonder whether in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those are the same things that . . . if children today growing up reflect on these things the same way. Is it the CBC, is it that national broadcasting, is it that Canadian image and those Canadian values which are coming into their home. Or is it in fact other programming? Is it a more American programming? Is it programming from other countries that is coming in and shaping their views?

I think we need to understand that Canadians are different. We are unique and we have a very interesting and I think . . . I think it's a perspective and a cultural heritage that we need to celebrate in this nation. And I'm not sure that by going to a more nationalized, homogenized approach to broadcasting in this nation, that we are going to see this happen.

The member opposite I know is anxious to get into the debate and I won't take long, and I'll allow him to get to his feet and speak on this important issue.

But I do want to say a few things about the approach which is being taken. Today there is a very well-known, a very well-known advertisement which is playing from one of our national breweries. It's simply known, in the popular culture, as the rant. This of course is Molson Canadian's great "I am a Canadian." You know, Joe, the Canadian, who stands up and talks about how he differs from being an American.

And I find it interesting, I find it interesting that in many ways this beer commercial has come to define more of what is Canadian than much of the programming that we have. And I worry about this. And I worry about it that we are losing the touchstones that we used to have 20 years ago or 30 years ago or 40 years ago that were reflected back to us from our national broadcaster that talked about the things that made us Canadian.

Now Molson Canadian makes a fine product but that is not . . . I certainly am not going to turn to Molson Canadian's marketing department to find a reflection of what is Canada.

And what I fear is that if we are going to lose, if we are going to lose the regional diversity and the voices that we have in this country that reflect back in terms of politics, in terms of culture, in terms of the arts, in terms of community life, if we lose that or if it becomes homogenized, then we are losing something very important that will weaken our nation. And I think that that's an extremely important thing for us to take note of.

People maybe say that this is not something that would in fact happen. But I say simply take a look at what is reflected out of Saskatchewan in the national newspapers — in *The Globe and Mail*, in the *National Post*. Both fine publications, both fine publications, but frankly the only things that we see these days are stories on court trials, stories on convicted . . . unfortunately the convicted senator from here. We see the court case involving Jack Ramsay. We see the . . . the last time I saw an exposé on Saskatchewan, it involved the notoriety and the unfortunate situation of the 1980s and the many criminal trials that came out of it.

Certainly that is a part of our history. Certainly that is part of Saskatchewan politics. Dark days, dark hours. But that certainly does not reflect what goes on in our political life in this province. And if we're relied on the *National Post* to tell the story or we relied on *The Globe and Mail* to tell the story, then frankly if we end up relying on nothing more than the national news to tell that story, that is all we'll hear.

Because unfortunately it's the conflict that ends up being the big splash and the big story. It's not the nuances, it's not the subtleties, it's not the celebrations of everyday Saskatchewan life which make it onto the national news.

I wish it did. I wish it did; but it doesn't. And so what we have got to talk about and what we have got to take a look at is with the CBC plan in particular, is how do we maintain that voice. How do we make sure that our stories of ordinary Saskatchewan people, ordinary Saskatchewan families, become part of the daily record in this nation as well?

Now the CBC currently under its broadcast licence is required to carry some seven and a half, eight hours of programming, I believe, weekdays, of local programming in our province. The proposal is to go to less than eight minutes a day — less than eight minutes a day of local programming.

Well how do you tell the story of Saskatchewan people in eight minutes a day? I'm not saying that the . . . let me put this right up front. It's not that we don't have other people out there broadcasting and telling the stories. But with the way that the national networks have gone, it is increasingly difficult for us to have our western voices, and our Saskatchewan voice in particular, heard.

We are not Albertans. We are not Manitobans. And the argument from Mr. Rabinovitch and others that by having a regional broadcast centre in Winnipeg and having a regional broadcast centre in Calgary, that the Prairies are covered off, leaves a great big gaping hole. Because my story, the story of the lives and these people here, aren't going to make Calgary's newscast.

The arts communities' stories that come out of Saskatoon or out

of Regina that we see on *Arts Reel* on Friday afternoons aren't going to make it onto Manitoba's broadcast list. So what we'll end up with is those big controversies becoming Saskatchewan's contents and Saskatchewan's contribution to national news.

Not that they shouldn't be, not that they're not reflective of a certain piece of it. But the fact is that there's much more to Saskatchewan — there's much more to the Saskatchewan community than these high profile stories.

And to lose that, to lose the programming time we will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, lose a lot of the texture that is part of the Canadian social fabric. And this is a very important issue for us. We need to work on ways to make sure that Saskatchewan is recognized.

As I understood the plan that was being looked at by the CBC, there was talk that they would maintain regional broadcast centres in Newfoundland, they'd maintain another one in Halifax, they would maintain Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver as the main regional broadcast centres. But by my count the provinces that lose out are PEI (Prince Edward Island), New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan. Why is that? Why is that?

(1615)

And how is there a benefit to the Canadian story by excluding these three provinces or forcing us to tell our story in eight minutes of news broadcast time a day. How does that work? How do we get out the important issues that are part of everyday Saskatchewan life? How do we foster that dialogue? And how do we deal with the issues that are not directly news related but still part of our community?

There's an interesting article by Maggie Siggins in the December 18, 1997 *Globe and Mail*. And in that she goes on to about the losses that we've seen already from CBC programming in terms of local broadcast.

There was a time when we had *Utopia Café*; there was a time when we had *What on Earth* broadcast out of here; we had *Country Canada*; we saw *Meeting Place*. There were a variety of prairie Saskatchewan-oriented type programs that used to make it onto the national television waves. We don't have that any more.

Now certainly there are other ways to celebrate this. We've had great . . . I think all of us took great pride with Gail Bowen's success in having her books made into made-for-television movies. This is good to see but we shouldn't be looking at these as the exceptions. It should simply be a part of everyday life in this nation. That we can turn on the television set and see the stories of Canadian people broadcast back to us.

For some reason, Atlantic Canada seems to be more successful at getting that story out than we do. Whether it's because they do it in humour through *Codco* or through . . . what is the Marg Delahunty program . . . *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, or some of these other programs, whether they have more success getting their stories into the national psyche than we do, I don't know.

But there is a great cultural vacuum which is already occurring in this nation frankly, and I am concerned that if we are going to see an increase . . . or a greater reduction in the amount of programming time allocated, that we are only going to further diminish that.

People say, well this may just be fear-mongering. But I say to members, take a look at what happened in this province alone. It was not many years ago that CBC consolidated its Saskatoon and Regina operations into Regina.

Now obviously here in Regina this has been a positive. We've maintained our broadcasting. But I think any of us that watch the programming know that there is . . . there are many fewer stories being told that come out of Saskatoon or out of the north central part of our province that are equally valuable in terms of being told and deserve as much time and recognition.

This is certainly the case in the southern part of the province as well. Regina does not solely reflect the view of Saskatchewan. We know that with the loss of the Saskatoon broadcast centre and the move away from that, with consolidation of it here in Regina, that we have seen a deterioration in the programming.

There is at this point no other news organization that broadcasts a provincial news broadcast. Saskatoon has its own CTV broadcast and its own Global broadcast. P.A. (Prince Albert) I think shares Saskatoon's feed. In Regina we have our own Global and our own CTV broadcast. But CBC fills a void of providing a national . . . or a provincial broadcast.

Imagine now if we ripped that out. Take that away. Then instead what we end up doing is, yes, Mr. Rabinovitch says he'll add in eight more sites for regional broadcast. I doubt very much that any of those are going to be in Yorkton or Swift Current or P.A. My guess is that you'll see more voices out of central BC (British Columbia), out of central Ontario, and out of Quebec.

And I don't know how that serves Canada. I don't know how that serves the Canadian culture. And I don't know how that meets the national broadcast objectives of the CBC.

This is an important issue not just in terms of the jobs, not just in terms of the approach that CBC is taking, but in terms of the importance of this issue in terms of making sure Saskatchewan people have a role to play in the cultural life of this nation.

We are a great, diverse, interesting people, and by pulling out that regional broadcast, by forcing it into eight minutes . . . Assuming that we actually get eight minutes. Let's remember it's going to be shared regionally so we may get four and Manitoba may get four. Well what stories do you tell out of that? What does it become? Is it simply the latest, the top story in the . . . is it just the top story in the legislature? Is it some story in one community? How do we make sure that we get all of these stories reflected?

I hope that CBC, the CBC board will take a look at television and look at the benefit of CBC radio and the programming initiatives they've taken there, where we do, I think, in Saskatchewan have a very strong radio program. Whether that's the morning edition . . . I know I listen every morning and hear

the news out of the North. I listen to the afternoon edition as I drive home. And there is, in fact, this — there is a sense that the province is larger than simply Regina. And I think that CBC television can learn from this. I think that CBC television can learn from this.

And I hope that what Mr. Rabinovitch does is not simply dam the torpedoes and jam this through. I would hope that he would have the opportunity to listen to what we're saying not simply what the Liberal members of the House of Commons committees are saying but to actually hear what ordinary Saskatchewan people say. Because it's here that we're going to lose. The rest of Canada will lose too by not having this understanding of us. And frankly, I think this is a great, a great detriment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know other members want to address this issue and so I won't take up any more time. But I will move:

That this Assembly urge the federal government and the board of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to recognize the importance to national unity of a strong, independent regional broadcasting network, and that they provide the necessary direction and material to allow our publicly-funded, non-commercial network to continue providing regionally based news coverage and program development in Saskatchewan.

And this will be seconded by the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very proud and also very humble to follow the last speaker. Like him, I've seen those beer commercials — the I am Joe, I am Canadian. They haven't quite spoken to me but I have to tell you that his speech spoke to me.

I have a passion for CBC and it is so wonderful to hear it so articulately laid out as the member who spoke before me has just done. And I do congratulate him for his speech.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I came to the legislature this morning and was told what the private members' motion would be today, I thought oh no, here we go again, and why do we have to continue doing this — standing up and trying to save our national institutions. Why is it that yet again we're still having to talk about the importance of CBC radio and television to the regions? Why is it that our national institutions seem to be so constantly under attack?

Of course, we know why they're under attack. It's because they are underfunded. Over the last few years the budget to CBC has been slashed by 33 per cent.

Now I can understand as a politician if we had a provincial network, we might be sometimes tempted to punish the media. Because not often as politicians are we pleased with the stories that get out. Whether we're in opposition or government, we

always find the nuances that we would like to hear on a story don't quite come out.

And so I suppose as politicians we would often be tempted to shoot the messenger. And it is unfortunate that the federal Liberals have followed through on that temptation and they are attempting not to shoot the messenger but to strangle the messenger. Death by a thousand cuts is what's occurring.

I would appeal first of all to the federal Liberals to reconsider what they're doing. You cannot continue to eviscerate CBC, a proud national institution, and expect that we will either have the local Saskatchewan stories reflected in the Canadian fabric or even the broad Canadian stories reflected. This evisceration of CBC by the federal government, I would suggest, simply has to stop.

We have a balanced budget now. I commend the federal Liberals for what they've done in terms of bringing fiscal sanity back to the federal scene. Surely now, they can understand that it is time to once again restore the funding to CBC so that CBC television and radio can continue in that proud tradition of public broadcasting that Canadians have come to love, respect, and enjoy.

You know, what we see here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a continued dwindling with the local shows having to be pared back, cut, done away with, scrapped altogether, and so what has been happening is that viewers have started to turn to the other two networks to get their local news.

I think I'm a fairly good example of that. I am a dyed-in-the-wool CBC Radio fan. I don't listen to any other radio except CBC. And I have to tell you, quite frankly, often CBC AM grates on me and I would prefer not to hear it so I turn to CBC FM. I think the politically correct terms nowadays is CBC Radio One and CBC Radio Two.

I simply do not like commercial radio. But I have to tell you I'm probably in a minority of maybe 100 people. Most people like commercial radio.

But most people also like choice. And when they get something that they don't like they turn to another station or they turn to another television channel.

I found, because I am a CBC Radio fan, that on the rare occasions when I'm at home and actually able to watch television, I have always felt it is my Canadian patriotic duty to watch CBC television. Well, you know, you can only carry it so far I have to tell you. And as a Saskatonian, a chauvinistic Saskatonian I will admit, I find that while CBC television out of Regina does a fairly good job of reflecting the whole of province, it's not quite doing quite a good enough job of reflecting my city.

So I watch the first few minutes of CBC TV news, late night news, and then I switch over to CFQC. At the same time, I'm feeling like I'm committing a heresy because I know that what's happening is CBC's ratings are dropping. And what is happening is this is becoming part of a self-fulfilling prophecy — provide a product that isn't quite what the viewers want, they go to someplace else and the ratings drop.

I don't know whether this was a deliberate Machiavellian strategy by the federal government to allow the private broadcasters to flourish by turning off viewers and listeners, such as myself, from CBC or whether it's an accidental by-product. But I can tell you it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy that CBC television is not quite good enough, so therefore we go to another product, another network when we want to see our local news.

I don't think it has to always be that way though, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I firmly believe that if we could stop the cuts, stop the bleeding dry of CBC, that we have extremely creative, inventive individuals who are still working for CBC who could provide the leadership, the talent, so that we would once again have the kind of local and regional coverage that we all want and demand.

(1630)

We're here, I would suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to save CBC. That's CBC — Canadian Broadcasting Corporation — not TBC, the Toronto broadcasting corporation. We want our stories from Saskatchewan, from Alberta, BC (British Columbia), and all the other provinces. We do not want them solely coming out of one centre as good as that centre may be. We want to hear our own regional and local stories reflected.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not going to go on too long. I'm not going to make the obvious point, save briefly, that I do believe that this recent announcement of 4 to 500 layoffs across Canada for CBC is probably a violation of the commitment that CBC did make to the CRTC when they said that they would ensure that there was a minimum of seven and a half hours of regional programming.

I'm not going to go on too long about what I think about their proposal for local bureaus because I think it is self-evident to any of us who have watched bureaucracies and watch what happens — I would predict, with these eight local bureaus that they're proposing to have with satellite uplinks that, first of all, they're going to find out that (a) those satellite uplinks are incredibly expensive and much more expensive than they are anticipating and will likely mean that there will be a net cost savings of zero.

I think that what they're going to find out when these satellites turn out to be so expensive that they're going to then have to embark on yet another round of cuts and we're going to see even those kinds of small bureaus — those pocket bureaus — being cut. Then we will truly not have a CBC at all; it will be only Toronto-centric.

I also don't want to go on too long about their proposal to expand the supper news hour with 10-minute local inserts because I would think that when they stop and think about it, they're going to realize that those 10-minute local inserts and an hour long news broadcast — that's supper time — runs contrary to the busy lives and lifestyles that most Canadians have.

Most Canadians want to watch their local news for 10 to 15 minutes and then get on with the rest of their day. They're not going to sit down and say, well I've got an hour here and maybe my Saskatchewan/Manitoba eight-minute segment is going to

be coming at 6:46 or maybe it will be here at 6:23, but I'm sure I've got the whole hour to watch just in case I find out what's happened locally. This is simply not going to work and what they will find is that CBC television will lose even more viewers if they follow through on this proposal.

What I want to do instead is to tell you that over the last couple of months, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been in correspondence with Mr. Robert Rabinovitch, the president of CBC. I wrote him on February 6 about a relatively minor matter. And he very promptly responded on February 22. I then wrote him back again on March 22 — this time thanking him for his very courteous response, and also saying to him that I was concerned about the funding difficulties for CBC. In this case I referred specifically to CBC Radio one and two.

Mr. Rabinovitch, I will say, responded back on April 7, and indicated that CBC Radio one and two will receive an annual budget increase of some 6 million. He closes his letter off by saying:

CBC Radio plays a vital role in binding this wonderfully diverse country of ours together. It's something we do well, and it's something we're very proud of.

I agree with his sentiment. Unfortunately it doesn't go quite far enough. I would wish that he had mentioned CBC Television as well.

So I would like to take advantage of the fact that we have this *Hansard* right now. And I would like to dictate an open letter to Mr. Robert Rabinovitch. And my open letter would go like this:

To Robert Rabinovitch
President, CBC
250 Lanark Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1Z 6R5

Dear Mr. Rabinovitch:

Thank you very much for your prompt, courteous, and efficient correspondence of the last couple of months. I have really appreciated the efficiency that you have demonstrated in handling both minor matters and larger matters of substance.

I would like to write you at this time to point out that there are major concerns, not only in Saskatchewan but in all provinces in this country, with your proposal to do away essentially with regional programming.

Mr. Rabinovitch, you have impressed me as being a creative, inventive, and efficient man. I am sure that you can go back to the drawing board and find a better proposal for dealing with the budget crunch that you are now facing.

I am also sure, Mr. Rabinovitch, as time goes on and as Canadians start to realize the impact of the budget of CBC on their local and regional programming, that you will have more fuel to take to the federal government to convince them that they should provide better and more substantial funding for CBC television.

Mr. Rabinovitch, other legislatures in this country have passed fairly specific motions calling on CBC to maintain their own specific regional programming. In Newfoundland, Mr. Rabinovitch, they want to keep the *Here and Now* program. In Manitoba, they want to keep the program they call *24 Hours*. In Nova Scotia, they want to keep the program they call *First Edition*.

Saskatchewan could take that same position and argue, like a dog in the manger, we want only our local programming. But we're not doing that.

Just as we have led the way with medicare, just as we led the way by being the first province in all of Canada to have a balanced budget, just as we have led the way with our child action plan, Mr. Rabinovitch, we want to also lead the way by telling you that we would like to see local programming maintained all across this country. That's why, Mr. Rabinovitch, we have passed a motion saying:

That this Assembly urge the federal government and the board of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to recognize the importance to national unity of a strong, independent regional broadcasting network, and that they provide the necessary direction and material to allow our publicly funded . . . network to continue providing regionally based news coverage and program development in Saskatchewan.

We want . . . In closing I would say: Mr. Rabinovitch, we want a public broadcaster that reflects our communities, our concerns, our hearts. Mr. Rabinovitch, we want a public broadcaster that will even reflect our flaws and our wrinkles. We are not Detroit, we are not Toronto. We are Saskatchewan. We're proud of it.

Thank you. Yours truly, Pat Lorje, MLA, Saskatoon Southeast.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In rising to speak to this issue, I want to deal with both the real issue that we all want to discuss here with respect to this motion as well as the specific motion itself.

Unfortunately this particular motion, the way it has been presented by the member for Regina South, I think does a disservice to the furtherance of raising the issue of improved local and regional news coverage in the province of Saskatchewan.

I say that specifically about the motion, Deputy Speaker. I think that the member, that both members have spoke . . . who have spoken prior to me, have done a much better job than the motion does itself of explaining the importance of this issue of local and regional coverage.

But I want to . . . What we're dealing with, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the motion that has been drafted . . . that has been presented rather, and I would like to speak to that if I may.

Mr. Speaker, rather than simply presenting a resolution founded wholly on the mutual desire of all members, and indeed the

people of our province, to do our part to protect and further the cause of expanded local and provincial media coverage, the member in introducing issues into this emotion . . . into this motion that he has introduced, I believe, has eroded its potential to solicit unanimous or at least broad-based support.

But, Mr. Speaker, the resolution is not solely a platform from which we can all call for the preservation and hopefully the improvement of local and provincial coverage from CBC and other corporate media outlets in our province, but it is also, upon close examination, a platform to espouse the virtues of government controlled or owned media being able to further various issues.

In this resolution in particular, the issue is national unity and possibly the issue of publicly funded commercial ventures versus the private sector. It is a platform, Mr. Speaker, from which an argument for publicly funded broadcasters versus private broadcasters could be made.

And it is the introduction of these concepts and ideas into the resolution that weaken it, Mr. Speaker. For many of us, support of this motion as it currently reads would be tantamount to support for concepts that go far beyond a common sense argument for the preservation and improvement of local and provincial news in our province, be it from CBC or some other outlet.

Indeed, many members on this side of the House could identify many other attendant issues to the one we debate today that we believe could result in the preservation of this local and provincial news outlet that we speak to today. For example, many people who feel strongly about the news hour programs specifically, and I note that other provinces that have entertained a resolution like this have actually referred directly and specifically to the program, the supper news or the evening news, that they were trying to protect.

But for those who feel strongly about our specific program here, CBC *News Hour*, they might ask — rather than get into these issues that have been introduced in this motion — they might ask about other services that could be cut at CBC or about revenue-generating opportunities in order to preserve this particular program. They might ask about the potential for CBC Radio to move towards a greater acceptance of commercial advertisements. They might ask about the potential for a scaling back or cutting of some CBC French radio and television services in areas like Saskatchewan, where there simply aren't the numbers to justify these very expensive programs.

I for one, and many people in my constituency, would put a lot of credence in that. If they felt they could preserve the television newscast and the television coverage in the province of Saskatchewan by trading off some of the French services we currently have, I believe many people in my constituency and many people that we represent on this side of the House, and frankly on the other side, would be interested in at least discussing that.

And then again, for those who perhaps are not as concerned about the . . . this specific program, the *News Hour* program specifically, but would like improved and better provincial news coverage, they might want to ask questions about CBC moving to more affiliate organizations where privately owned

television stations, independent television stations are CBC affiliates and carry their own local news.

I could tell you that there is a lot of merit in the argument, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has proven to be a successful arrangement in my constituency, in the city of Swift Current for decades.

In Swift Current, there is a local television station that has been there since I . . . well, since I've been around and arguably that's not that long of a time, but I'm told that it was there well before that. It's CJFB Television. They are an independently, privately owned television station that are a CBC affiliate, so they provide CBC programming to the community and to the entire southwest.

We can get the national news, of course, as everyone does on CBC, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they also do their own local news. So even perhaps better from our perspective then, CBC news final or *News Hour* here in Regina, we get a local newscast provided by this independent, privately owned station that is a CBC affiliate.

So many people across the province who would share the concerns that we've heard by the member for Regina South and the member for Saskatoon Southeast might want to know about this alternative. Might want to know about the opportunities for independent stations to be CBC affiliates and carry all of the programming — not the least of which, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are things like *Hockey Night in Canada*— in our community that people want access to as well as some of the public affairs programming, but then have a time for local news, for local television news and community affairs, and the TV station in Swift Current has been doing that for some time.

(1645)

Now it is a competitive business and so if you come to the CBC affiliate in Swift Current and have a look around, it won't be nearly as opulent as what you'll see here at the facilities in the government-owned and operated station. There you will . . . in Swift Current you will see reporters being their own cameraman, being their own editors, and indeed being their own anchors. But they get around to the community, and they do the best job that they can of carrying local issues and local news on television.

And so many of these people wonder when they look at that station, they wonder is CBC running perhaps as lean as it could on a province-wide or a national basis? And I think some of them have come to the conclusion that the answer is no. And I think that on this side of the House, we would like to see CBC doing that to a greater extent. We think they could preserve things like *News Hour* if they were to be able to do that.

But the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that if we introduced a similar resolution today that was predicated on some of the areas that I've just touched on in my speech, that too would be unfair and unnecessarily complicating, just as the motion now appears before us is those things.

What we need today is a resolution that is clear on the issue for which we can all find some agreement. We need a resolution that speaks to the specific situation, but also to the general issue

of the corporate media giants and their perspective treatment of Saskatchewan.

And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move the following motion which clarifies this resolution in my opinion and the issues that I have outlined, and it is seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone and it reads as follows, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

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

expresses its concern regarding the continued erosion of provincial media outlets and reporters in Saskatchewan who can provide the people of our province in Canada the vital information regarding events in our communities and our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. It's a great privilege to second the motion put forth by the member from Swift Current regarding this very issue. And I think of the couple of words that I really want to key in on the motion or the amendment is the continual erosion of public media outlets.

And when I look at the original motion put forward, it talks about independent regional broadcast network, and I think that's where the rub really comes in. I don't know if we want to be going to regional broadcast networks as is mentioned in this motion. And I really, as I mentioned, a privilege to second the motion.

When we talk about the erosion of provincial media outlets — and I think that is the most important part — and I think every member of the legislature would agree that more news coverage of events in Saskatchewan by Saskatchewan reporters is better than no coverage at all.

And I think we've been seeing over the last number of years, the coverage that is put forward to the political sphere in our province has been dwindling. There's not as many people covering it through the papers, through the radio, or through the electronic news service, the TV, and it reflects then on the stories that are covered.

It seems that many times when you watch the evening news that because of the limited resources of media outlets in our province, is that they can cover one story, maybe one or two stories.

And so what that puts a government and especially opposition up against is prioritizing which are the one or maybe two stories that are the most important when we may have a whole host of different issues that we'd like to cover. And I think we certainly get in danger when we start limiting and eroding the provincial service such as it been over the last number of years.

It's an interesting relationship between politics, politicians, and the media. And it can be very tenuous at some points. I remember listening to the late Eric Malling speaking at — a member of Swift Current, I believe — and speaking at a forum here in the city and talking about how the media, he was talking

from a media perspective, on how it works. And then the media is so important to all of us to get our message out.

And he says so often that the media, you know, it can take a small, small special interest group dealing with one specific interest and they make enough noise that the media picks it up. The media picks up that issue and broadcasts it throughout the province and people watch that. Then we as politicians sometime talk, what is the important issue in your world today. Well it was what they had just happened to have seen on TV, which may be just a very small special interest group but it's got national or provincial recognition.

And we always have to worry about that. And what happens I feel as we see the broadcast, the network, or the media eroding, is that we have a greater chance of that happening, where small special interest groups get the eye of the media and get their point out across the province, but it maybe isn't reflective of the whole population. So you know, we have to watch that we don't get into the situation where it's so eroded that we have that problem.

And, as mentioned by the member from Swift Current, he spoke regarding affiliate stations, privately owned stations that are affiliates of CBC and it's not just in Swift Current that that is the case. There's also affiliates in Yorkton and Prince Albert, and another three or four cities in the province which work quite nicely. They offer their own local news service and they cover the local issues and they are able to use some of the national broadcast services as well.

And, you know . . . so I don't know if we have to throw the whole thing out. If we don't support CBC totally, we lose it completely and I think that's probably missing the mark. And that's why I really support the amendment to the motion that we don't want to see it erode any more and we need to take steps and look at all the possible options to keep as many news services working in the province, whether it is print again, radio, or TV, to cover the message that's being put out.

We must recognize that a local television level, as far as news goes, the private broadcaster far outstrips the CBC in terms of viewers.

And, you know, I question that. I wonder why that is. In my previous life before I got into politics, I spent a lot of time . . . I was working with the Saskatchewan Safety Council and was doing most of the media work with them. And it really . . . I had to question when we would do a press release and have the media come and cover a press release, whether it was Safe Driving Week, whether it was an issue on cellphones in vehicles, we would have one fellow come from, for example CK TV and he would cover the story.

I remember a specific issue on school bus safety we were dealing with. We had one person from CTV, we had a couple of people from the radio stations, and there was four people from CBC to cover that one issue. There was two cameraman and a reporter from the English and a reporter from the French. And when I watched the stories after, I questioned, was the CBC story four times better than the CTV story? And I'm sorry, it wasn't.

You know, and you would think that when you look at the ratings, that they should have so much higher ratings because of all the number of people they have covering the story. But that's not necessarily the case.

And I think that really we have to question the amount of money that is put into CBC and whether there couldn't be a whole lot of cost cutting with . . . at the same time maintaining local coverage. I think there is a lot of areas that could be cut and also maintain local coverage.

So I am pleased to second the motion put forward by the member of Swift Current and not agree with the motion put forward by the member from Regina South. And at this time I'd like to adjourn debate on this subject.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

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