

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present a petition today on behalf of citizens who are concerned about the new tobacco regulations.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

People that have signed this petition are from Tisdale, Saskatoon, and Sylvania, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise on behalf of citizens concerned with the tobacco legislation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

Signatures on this petition, today, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Tisdale and Ridgedale.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with the federal government, First Nations' representatives, and with other provincial governments to bring about a resolution in the Lake of the Prairies situation and to ensure that our natural resources as a whole are used in a responsible manner by all people in the future.

All the signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Gerald.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens of the province. I'd like to read all the little notes along the side of this petition, but I can't. The prayer reads as follows:

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

the necessary repairs to Highway 35 in the Indian Head-Milestone constituency in order to prevent injury and loss of life and the loss of economic opportunity in this area.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by people in the Vibank, Francis, Milestone, Abernethy, and Colfax area.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of constituents who are apparently very concerned about the lack of tobacco control legislation in the province of Saskatchewan, judging from the condition of the petition. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners are from the city of Swift Current as well as the town of Cadillac.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition dealing with tobacco legislation:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; furthermore, anyone found guilty of such offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

As duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Moose Jaw, Aylesbury, Pangman, Lloydminster, Regina, and Saskatoon.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to read a petition from citizens concerned about the increasing crop insurance premiums and the coverage reductions. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plans to take money out of crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Biggar and district.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from citizens concerned about the deplorable state of Highway No. 15. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its highway budget to address the concerns of the serious conditions of Highway 15 for the Saskatchewan residents.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from Simpson, Young, and Imperial.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are received as addendums to sessional papers no. 7, 8, 10, 11, 18, and 25.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: how much revenue did the government collect from provincial sales tax charged on the used goods sold by auction companies in the fiscal year 2000-2001?

And, Mr. Speaker, I have an identical question pertaining to the years 2001-2002.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Sask Water: can the minister please provide this Assembly with which communities were turned down under the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program that applied for funding for water and sewer upgrades in the calendar year 2001; and further to that, why were these communities turned down?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce through you or to you and through you to the members of this place, nine students from the road to employment program at the Rainbow Youth Centre. They're accompanied today by their teachers, Raylene LeBlanc and Jen Reid.

It's a very successful program, Mr. Speaker; it's in its fifth edition. So in the spirit of the Rainbow I'd like to bid them a big Ta wow, a big bienvenue, a big shalom, salaam, and welcome

to this place. So join me everyone please in welcoming our guests from Rainbow Youth Centre. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as well I would like to extend a special welcome to the group from the Rainbow Youth Centre and wish them well in their road to employment. And we trust that you'll have an enjoyable afternoon observing question period and the way this Assembly works and how your members work so hard on your behalf. Welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we are joined by the Leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, David Karwacki, and by the Liberal candidate in Weyburn-Big Muddy, Ms. Janet Ledingham. I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce two former constituents of mine — I wish they were still my constituents.

Seated in your gallery are Allan and Ulla Cinnamon who used to reside in Carnduff, actually about 10 miles south of my farm, and unfortunately for me but fortunately for the member from Estevan they have moved to Estevan to reside and to participate in activities in those communities. I'd like to ask everyone to welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatoon Synagogue Fire

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this last weekend Saskatoon's Jewish community was victimized by an arsonist who torched a synagogue. Valuable pieces of the synagogue's history, including some books that were over 100 years old that were stored in that particular library, were destroyed.

This is a very sad time for the congregation of Agudas Israel Synagogue, the Jewish community, and for all people in Saskatoon and in Saskatchewan. Since the fall of 2000 when the latest round of fighting broke out in the Middle East, the Canadian Jewish Congress has reported 50 anti-Semitic incidents, including five fires, in Canada. We sincerely hope that this fire is not an intentional act against the Jewish community.

The Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, condemns such acts of violence and destruction, especially those directed at a religious or ethnic group. We ask that the people of Saskatchewan come together and support the Saskatoon Jewish community as they rebuild their synagogue and heal the emotional wounds that these acts of hate and disrespect cause.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Synagogue Fire

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this past Friday an act of arson took place in the basement library of the Jewish community centre and synagogue in my constituency.

The fire was restricted to this one room but damage of about \$130,000 was suffered; and more significantly, some irreplaceable religious books and archives were lost. Thankfully no one was injured.

The Premier visited the site yesterday and today issued a statement which I'd like to quote in part. He said, and I quote:

There can be little doubt the synagogue was targeted, making this more than a random act of violence. On behalf of Saskatchewan citizens, I would like to convey our sadness that such an uncharacteristic incident of violence should occur within our province. I am confident I speak for people of all faiths in Saskatchewan who see such an act as appalling.

Mr. Speaker, this act is uncharacteristic of our province. We are not a people who tolerate acts of hatred and intolerance. We're proud of our multicultural, multiracial, multi-faith, and we cannot stand for incidents that would tarnish that value.

I know I speak on behalf of all members of the legislature when I say that this was the isolated act of a marginal individual. Nevertheless it is a reminder that as long as there is one nameless, faceless individual willing to exercise hatred, the rest of us must be constantly prepared to stop it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

YWCA's Women of Distinction Nominations

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was fortunate to be with a group of amazing women who are working to make Saskatchewan a better province for all citizens — especially women — to live in.

Some of my colleagues and I attended the Regina YWCA's (Young Women's Christian Association) 2002 Women of Distinction nomination tea at the Centre of the Arts yesterday afternoon. At the tea we met a group of women who have come to exemplify the YWCA's women of distinction — that is a woman who displays sustained and significant commitment to society in her field of endeavour and beyond, whether that commitment is displayed locally, nationally, or internationally.

The Regina YWCA's Women of Distinction Awards are some of the oldest in the country. Mr. Speaker, they were introduced in 1981. These awards reflect the YWCA's commitment to the women of this province; to strive to empower women to reach their full potential — be it through innovative support programs and services or encouraging them to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

The awards give us as community and a province the

opportunity to celebrate women's talents and achievements. Mr. Speaker, 36 women in all have been nominated for awards in nine categories. These women come from Regina and surrounding areas. And although only nine of these nominated will be officially recognized at the May 2 awards dinner in Regina, Mr. Speaker, I believe all of these women deserve recognition from the members of this House for their accomplishments, their contributions to Saskatchewan communities, and to their continual efforts to make Saskatchewan a better place in which to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sexual Assault Awareness Week

Mr. Adley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, April 7 to April 13 has been proclaimed Sexual Assault Awareness Week in Saskatchewan. This week is an opportunity to raise awareness of sexually oriented violence in our society. This is a time to recognize that every person has a right to live without violence or the fear of violence, degradation, and sexual exploitation. It is also a time to recognize that we all have a responsibility to take action against violence.

The week is annually proclaimed by the government at the request of the Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan, SASS. SASS is a provincial coalition of 10 Saskatchewan agencies that provide support and services to people — primarily women — who have been sexually assaulted.

Prevention through education is the most effective way of protecting vulnerable persons from sexual violence. The members of SASS are working towards that goal. As individuals we can prevent sexual assault by raising awareness. We can talk to our children about keeping safe. We can support women in our communities who have been sexually assaulted by not blaming the victim.

Violence continues to be reality for too many women and children in our province. Sexual Assault Awareness Week is a time for all of us to reflect and to take action towards the elimination of sexually related violence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

2002 Roland Michener Canada Games Award

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate a young man from my constituency, Ryan Schedlosky. Mr. Schedlosky is the recipient of the 2002 Roland Michener Canada Games Award. He received this honour from the Canada Games Council at the 29th annual Canada Games Sports awards.

The award is presented every two years to Canada Games athletes who exemplify strong leadership skills on and off the playing field, combined with an ongoing commitment to scholastic and athletic excellence.

Ryan is a first year kinesiology student in Saskatoon at the University of Saskatchewan. He is a member of the varsity wrestling team. At the Canada Games he won the gold medal.

He went undefeated at the games, winning seven matches, including five pins. Ryan was also the Canadian juvenile wrestling championship . . . champion.

I have had the privilege of speaking about Ryan's accomplishment in wrestling over the last few years. Ryan is a very gifted athlete and has worked hard at this sport. So I'd like to take this time today to congratulate Ryan Schedlosky. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Final Project Day

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I had a very pleasant and informative time touring the exhibits of Final Project Day. This was a display put on by the University of Regina Engineering faculty and the Regina Engineering Society.

The projects on display were created by the graduating engineering students and cover the disciplines of electronic, industrial, environmental, and petroleum engineering.

There were 51 projects in all and I understood each one of them, Mr. Speaker. As a reporter for *The Leader-Post* said, they ranged from the "humorous to the highbrow," from an automated beer and wine sanitizer to an "Intelligent Traffic System — a before and after study."

At the risk of slighting the others, my personal favourite was a lawn maintenance robot which will, quote:

provide general lawn maintenance tasks without human intervention.

That leaves both hands free for the more appropriate summer pastimes, some of which involve the automated sanitizer mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, even if I didn't understand every project, I did understand the most pertinent fact — these exhibits were creations by the fertile minds of energetic and excellently trained Saskatchewan students who are now poised to make their way and make a difference in the workplaces of the world.

I congratulate and I wish them well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Hockey Championships

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, March 31 the Pipestone Valley Jets defeated the Melville Millionaires to win the south Saskatchewan double A midget league championship.

Mr. Speaker, this was an accomplishment as they entered the playoff round sitting in fifth place and quite a few points behind the league leaders. I would like to congratulate the Pipestone Valley Jet team, their coach Dennis Scott, and his assistants Scott Hamilton and Marvin Kay on a job well done.

As well this past Friday, April 5, the Moosomin Rangers defeated a team from my colleague's seat, the Churchbridge

Imperials, to win the triangle hockey league championship. Congratulations to Lyle Balog and his staff and the Moosomin Rangers team for a very successful season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Economic Growth in Regina

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the growing Regina economy. In the month of March construction, manufacturing, management, and administration jobs all increased according to the StatsCan numbers compiled by the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority.

Management of companies, administration, and other support service positions have more than doubled from this time last year. Moreover construction is up 83 per cent and manufacturing up 30 per cent.

Regional Economic Development president/CEO (chief executive officer), Tim Feduniw, said, and I quote:

Looks like construction jobs are still showing growth because of major projects such as the soundstage, new IGA store, and some apartment buildings. When we look at the bigger picture more people are looking for work and most of them are finding jobs.

More examples, Mr. Speaker, of a growing job market in Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

North Battleford Water Inquiry Report

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the report of the commission of inquiry into the outbreak of cryptosporidium in the North Battleford water supply was released to the public late last Friday. The report is a damning indictment of the NDP (New Democratic Party) government.

It outlines how the NDP sacrificed the safety of our drinking water and the health of Saskatchewan residents beginning with the decisions made by the new Department of Environment in 1993. Justice Laing's report says, and I quote:

Whatever power struggles or discussions went on within the department over budget the end result was that the quality drinking water program was sacrificed as a matter of choice not necessity.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: what power struggles went on with the NDP government that led them to sacrifice the quality drinking water program in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, day after day we stand in this Assembly and we hear that opposition — spend, and spend, and spend, Mr. Speaker. That opposition, Mr. Speaker, they

spend left and they vote right.

And we've always maintained as a province, Mr. Speaker, we're going to work alongside of our towns, of our hamlets, and our villages to work together to meet the challenge of providing safe water.

And I would ask those members and that member in particular, Mr. Speaker, to rise above the politics of the day, to try and work alongside of the government in a cohesive fashion so we're able to come up with a solution that will serve Saskatchewan residents for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, this government has made good progress and greater progress will be made. But the first step is to not play politics with this issue and let us rise above all the politics and get to the bottom of this challenge, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, politics aside, the NDP cannot hide from their responsibility for the fact that thousands of people became sick and hundreds still have long-term health care problems from the contamination of the North Battleford water supply.

The NDP had a choice. Mr. Laing indicated that they had a choice and they knew what the consequences would be. He says in finding no. 44, the choice was made knowing the result would be a reduction in overall quality of drinking water in Saskatchewan.

The NDP had a choice, and all of the people of Saskatchewan need to know they had a choice. And they knew what the results would be, yet they chose not to fulfill their mandate to ensure a safe supply of drinking water in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, how could the NDP choose not to meet their mandate?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this government will meet its mandate. Mr. Speaker, this government has made good progress. And, Mr. Speaker, this government will make greater progress.

And I've asked that member time and time again not to play politics with this water file because it is above and beyond politics, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again we've asked him. And Commissioner Laing's mandate was to not lay blame, Mr. Speaker. Commissioner Laing's mandate was to find out what went wrong and how we can stop it from occurring again, Mr. Speaker.

And this is exactly what this government intends to do, Mr. Speaker. The problem is . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, order. The minister has 20 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, it's important that we tell a story. First of all, last year, this province put in \$1.4 million in new funding for staff. We hired 11 new inspectors through SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource

Management), Mr. Speaker; 4.5 new positions at the Provincial Lab to make sure and turn around some of the tests quicker and sooner; mandatory certification of water treatment plant operators by 2005, Mr. Speaker; and last year we spent \$30 million in CSIP (Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program) funding.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Justice Laing is very clear about the government and particularly, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management not fulfilling their mandate. He also indicates that perhaps the provincial cabinet did not fulfill their mandate.

Mr. Laing says in finding no. 43 that the provincial cabinet was fully aware of the effect of water quality management would have . . . the reduction in water quality management would have on the province.

The Treasury Board was presented with SERM's budget proposals and all the background information that accompanies them. They knew that cutting the drinking water monitoring program would mean SERM would not meet its mandated and legislated responsibilities. They knew that as it states on page 210 of this report, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

Without active management of the program, the health of people with some Saskatchewan communities will be at risk.

Mr. Speaker, how could the NDP cabinet approve this decision to allow SERM to break its own legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again we look forward to standing up on this question period and providing as many of the answers and providing components of our plan to help the communities across this country and across this province by way of example and by way of support to show them how, together, we can build a brand new water treatment system and make sure the water that people are drinking is safe water, Mr. Speaker.

And I say that, members, shame on you for playing politics with this very important . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. First I would ask members to quieten down a little and I would ask the member to direct all of his remarks to the Chair. The member has about ten seconds.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this year, Mr. Speaker, for that member's information, to meet this challenge . . . to meet this challenge and work alongside of the many communities, I want to make sure people know out there that we have 18 new positions and \$2.4 million in new funding to bring to a total of two years, \$3.8 million and 33 new positions . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, we as the opposition are extremely curious and I think the people of North Battleford, who got sick, are extremely curious. How is it that the minister can stand there and he can defend the fact that this government did not fulfill its mandate through Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, cabinet did not fulfill its mandate and 7,000 people got sick as a result of it. And they broke their own law, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, time after time I get up in this Assembly and we ask that member and that party to join us in approving budgets to help put in some support systems in place. Inspections are one too, Mr. Speaker. We have to have a co-operative relationship with all the communities who own and operate these water systems, Mr. Speaker. It is a partnership approach of the First Nations community, with the federal government, the local governments, Mr. Speaker.

And any time you put any kind of support systems in place, Mr. Speaker, that member and that party vote against it. So I'd ask them today again. There's been some good progress made, there are some challenges that we have to overcome, and greater progress to be made. Mr. Speaker, this government is going to respond quicker and faster and, Mr. Speaker, the response will be in concert and in tangent with our local partner which is the governments of the cities, of the towns and the villages, the First Nations. We will work together to solve this problem, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of inspectors didn't actually seem to have a lot of bearing on it. Mr. Laing states that the lack of inspection of the North Battleford surface water treatment plant . . . didn't get an inspection for 10 years prior to 2001, and that that had a direct bearing on the contamination of the water supply.

According to his report, SERM officials were indicating by 1995 that the reduction in waterworks inspectors in the province was being noticed and it was having a dramatic negative impact. As early as 1994, SERM officials were indicating to Sask Health that there were so many drinking water safety problems in the province that they were preparing a cabinet decision item because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Yet even after all that, Mr. Speaker, the NDP moved to the risk management model, further reducing the number of water plant inspectors. Mr. Speaker, why did the Environment minister and the NDP government continue to ignore the warnings of their own department officials?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again we sit back and listen to members of the opposition rant and rave about what they should be spending on, what they shouldn't be spending on, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to point out . . . I want to point out last year when we hired some new inspectors, Mr. Speaker, to help meet some of the challenges, what did that member do, Mr. Speaker? What did that party do? They voted against that budget. So if they weren't going to play politics with this matter, they should have got up and they should have said you should have hired more — which we done this year, Mr. Speaker. And yet . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The minister may continue — 20 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again, Mr. Speaker, last year we hired more inspectors. They voted against it. This year we wanted to hire some more, and again they voted against it. So as we provide tools as we're able to afford some of these tools to help our community partners out there begin to address the challenges, they put up every roadblock possible.

So I would say again to that member, to that party: this is above and beyond politics. We have to make sure we work together with the community to begin to address these long-term challenge that we all face. And, Mr. Speaker, that work has to start now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Justice Laing concludes that it was only due to concerns raised by the Department of Health and Municipal Affairs that SERM did not completely abandon its role as regulator of drinking water in this province.

In the fall of 1999 and the spring of 2000, the Minister of Sask Water — who was then the minister of Environment — it was his department who was wanting to shirk their responsibilities and reduce water monitoring even further.

An e-mail Justice Laing prints in his report on page 215 from one department official says it best. And I quote:

I have never been comfortable with our overall approach . . . drinking water at SERM . . .

. . . it's our mandate, we've either got to deliver it ourselves or develop a partnership with another agency like Health for delivery . . . Whichever agency delivers the program, they've got to have the horsepower to do it; at the end of the day, the provincial government has a responsibility for safe drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why his Department of Environment was trying to get out of monitoring water quality in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the most important thing is to point out water inspections are one tool that we all need to make sure that safe water is provided to all citizens, Mr. Speaker.

And last year, Mr. Speaker — for the record — last year we increased the water inspection team to help with this whole challenge. And this year we've done it again. And on both occasions, what absolutely floors me, Mr. Speaker, is that member and that party voted against that.

So what we've always maintained, Mr. Speaker, is water plant inspection is one component of a series of supports that we need to put in place to make sure we have quality water for the people of Saskatchewan.

This government is going to work to meet that objective, Mr. Speaker. We are not going to play politics with the issue; we're going to stand by our municipal partners to make sure — and the First Nations partners — to make sure we have a good system in place to serve Saskatchewan for decades to come, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, the whole province now knows that the NDP has abrogated its responsibility for water quality. We know that they chose to reduce the water quality monitoring program. We know that despite repeated warnings from environment, health, and municipal officials, that they chose and chose continuously through choice. Mr. Laing uses that word over and over again in his report, Mr. Speaker.

There is one question: will anyone — will anyone — be held responsible? Thousands of people have had their health compromised because of these decisions. Yet somewhere in the NDP there are people who made those decisions, who chose to cut program spending. Or maybe that responsibility lies with the NDP cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, why did it cost \$2 million for a public inquiry only to be told that the NDP government from cabinet on down has known for the last 10 years about the problems that existed with water quality and actually made decisions contributing to those problems?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we can appreciate that 60 to 70 per cent of our population as a province is being served adequately to meet some of the standards and objectives to make sure drinking water is safe, Mr. Speaker.

We know we have about 30 to 40 per cent of the communities to work with. We are going to work with those communities, Mr. Speaker. We are going to take the lessons that we've learned from Justice Laing's document to make sure that we apply those lessons right across the province.

And I will point out, Mr. Speaker, no matter what good that we do with our partners — the municipal partners, the First Nations partners, the RM (rural municipality) partners — it's not good enough for the members opposite. And I will point out that we all have to be part of the overall solution.

And on this side, we're going to lead. On this side, we're going to support. On this side, we're going to learn. And on this side, we're not going to blink when it comes to commitment to helping our communities meet those needs in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is quite fond of throwing percentages around but we've had the incident in North Battleford and, at present, there are still 33 communities in Saskatchewan who don't meet minimum water treatment standards and 44 communities under boil-water advisories. Yet

the NDP are still sticking to their communication strategy as set out in the cabinet decision item from last year. You remember, don't you? And I quote:

The government realizes that drinking water quality is a priority issue and is committed to working with local governments and private systems' operators to provide quality drinking water in Saskatchewan to present and future generations.

Don't worry, be happy. Sound familiar, Mr. Speaker? Again today, that's all we've heard from this minister.

When is this minister and this government going to take responsibility for enforcing and maintaining their own laws, their own mandate, their own legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — For that member's information, this government has accepted the recommendations of Justice Laing. And, Mr. Speaker, we have been preparing for the last several years and will continue working to meet some of those recommendations and putting a plan in front of the people of Saskatchewan.

But we know, Mr. Speaker, that as a province we cannot do that job on our own. We have to have support from our partners, Mr. Speaker, and that includes the First Nations government, that includes the local governments, and that includes the federal government.

And I would point out again, Mr. Speaker, so very, very important — in this whole message of safe water we are telling absolutely everybody that we have to get involved, that education has to be out there, awareness has to happen. And what we get, Mr. Speaker, from that member opposite and that party opposite, nothing but politics. We will work the solution through and we'll stand by those communities who have particular problems, Mr. Speaker. At due times a solution will be found, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, last year in the government's own cabinet decision item, Mr. Speaker, it was indicated in there that it cost this province in excess of \$8 million a year in additional health care costs because of contaminated drinking water in this province. Hans Peterson of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation thinks it's probably around 10 million.

Mr. Speaker, 10 years, \$100 million. Is the minister prepared to go another 10 years and spend another \$100 million on people being sick in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, 10 years, \$700 million a year in interest payments; \$7 billion, Mr. Speaker, would have picked up every waster water and water treatment plant in this province for decades to come, Mr. Speaker.

So I'll point out, I'll point out that that there's been good progress made in many of the communities that he has listed. And that boil-water order has been worked on and many communities, as we speak, there's solutions being put in place, Mr. Speaker. And that work's not going to stop; that work's not going to stop.

This is only year 2 of a 5-year agreement, Mr. Speaker, and we will work away with that problem in concert and in co-operation with our partners, Mr. Speaker. And again, I point out, Mr. Speaker, \$7 billion could have fixed a lot of roads, a lot of water treatment plants. You could have put a lot of programs in place, and thanks to those cousins across the way, we had to clean up their mess to begin with. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely incredible that as of Friday this minister wants communities in this province to accept the financial and legal responsibility for safe drinking water in this province, but he will not provide anyone, the people of this province with any immediate answers.

Mr. Speaker, today we'll be moving an emergency motion calling on the provincial government to accept its responsibility in the North Battleford water crisis and that the government put forward a clear plan of provincial action for management and regulate safe water that does not off-load a majority of the responsibilities and costs onto communities and taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP accept their responsibility? Will they vote in favour of this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to debate. And what we're going to do as a government to meet some of the challenges . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. The minister will continue.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to stand in this Assembly and debate the merits of our plan versus their non-plan to help meet some of the challenges of the water quality across this province, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to that debate.

But what I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, is so very, very important, so very important, is every community — and I understand that member was a mayor at one time — they own their own system, Mr. Speaker. They set rates and they hire staff and they deliver services.

We never owned that system, Mr. Speaker. But we have to work in concert with the partners and make sure we regulate those systems and to make sure that we . . . any plan that we put forward, that the communities are aware what those plans are, Mr. Speaker.

So as a former mayor myself, I know communities own these systems. They look to the province for assistance to make sure training is there. They look to the province to make sure some

financial support is necessary. The province has got to be there, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to be there, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Job Loss Statistics

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The headline in Saturday's *National Post* said "Canada's job market on fire."

That should be great news except for one fact — the NDP has built a firewall at the Saskatchewan border. March was the best month in history for job creation in the entire country except for one province, and that province was our province, the province of Saskatchewan. Thousands of jobs created across the country . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. The member will continue.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every province creating jobs except Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence is in. The NDP is killing jobs right here in this province. And we have to ask: why is that? How can the NDP continue to lose jobs when the rest of the country is in a job-creation boom?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, you know as we have gone through the last decade, and it's . . . and we've gone through the transition that has taken place in agriculture in terms of the job numbers. I have listened in this House as members opposite have indicated their concern about the changes in agriculture, about how farmers are not getting enough for their commodity, and how farmers are leaving their farms, and how farmers are getting larger, and how the technology is making changes in terms of the amount of people that it takes to deal with our agriculture community. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I agree with them.

And it's not only happening . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order. Order, please. Order. I recognize the minister, 15 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the transition in agriculture, I agree with them. And it's not tied only to this province, Mr. Speaker. Canada lost 35,000 jobs in agriculture last year, of which 10,000 were right here in our province and 10,000 in the neighbouring province of Alberta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he may want to play politics with the numbers, but we had the third-highest job record this March in the history of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the

people of Saskatchewan are sick and tired of the minister responsible for Economic Development snivelling and whining and providing excuses for his government's lack of employment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I want the minister to listen. The minister and the government blamed September 11; but Canada has now recovered from the events of September 11.

Mr. Speaker, the minister and his government, the NDP, blame the low oil prices. Well, Mr. Speaker, oil is back to over \$26 US (United States) a barrel.

And, Mr. Speaker, like the minister did just a minute ago, they blame agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, the new figures show — and I want the minister to listen carefully — the new figures show that there were actually 12,000 new jobs created in agriculture across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, only Saskatchewan is the exception. Mr. Speaker, when is the minister and when is the NDP going to stop making excuses and start taking responsible . . . responsibility for their failure to create jobs in this province?

(14:15)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to that member that he is well aware of the transition that's taking place. He is well aware of this government's intention to move from primary agriculture to diversified agriculture.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that's the only member of this House — he along with his colleague — who don't understand that this transition is taking place.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that in the last decade this province has grown 50,000 non-agriculture jobs, and I think that's a record the people of Saskatchewan have got to be proud about. But, Mr. Speaker, take little credibility with what that member's saying, and I want to tell you why.

His economic development game plan is pretty simple; it's a one-liner. And that is that he's going to grow 100,000 people in 10 years. Mr. Speaker, how's he going to do it? He's going to do a great big tax decrease which he now admits he can't afford. He's going to carve the stomach out of the Crown corporations. He's going to fire civil servants, neither of which members of his caucus will admit to.

Mr. Speaker, that's their plan; they're afraid to talk about it. Our plan is here. We've lowered taxes and we're increasing jobs outside of agriculture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 20 — The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 20, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

The Speaker: — Oh, why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — To move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member is requesting leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity. Could the member read the motion, please?

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — The motion reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

That this Assembly call on the provincial government to accept its responsibility in the North Battleford water crisis and to put forward a clear plan for provincial action to manage and regulate safe water that does not off-load a majority of the responsibilities and costs onto communities and rate payers.

And the motion is seconded by the member from North Battleford.

Leave granted.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

North Battleford Water Inquiry

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think that the common consensus on Friday when the Laing report was released was that it was a damning indictment of the provincial government and its ability and its efforts in water management and regulation.

Now certainly there were other areas of responsibility as well, Mr. Speaker. But those other individuals and other voters will have a right to, at some point in the future, judge those for their actions.

But, Mr. Speaker, what we're here to do today is to discuss this government's performance, the decisions that this government has made over the last 10 years with respect to water quality.

I think one of the things, Mr. Speaker, that was the most surprising to anyone who read the report on Friday was that, when these decisions were originally taken to reduce the water quality programming, the water quality funding in this province, it wasn't done as a result of fiscal necessity. It wasn't done out of some greater good.

It was done as a result of power struggles within the NDP government; it was done because of turf wars between departments and agencies; and from all appearances some of these decisions, Mr. Speaker, were also made as a result of squabbles around the cabinet table.

Mr. Speaker, when I attended the release of the report on Friday it was extremely interesting for me to be sitting there now as a legislator, because I was taken back to my previous experience as mayor of Porcupine Plain as I was sitting there and listening to the response of the minister and the discussion that was going on.

And then later on in the weekend, listening to the talk shows and listening to a lot of the commentary about the report, I think that it reminded me so much of when I was mayor of Porcupine, how in so many cases, Mr. Speaker, when it came to the issues of water quality, to the issues of attempting to upgrade facilities in attempting to provide the best quality water possible for our ratepayers, on so many occasions, Mr. Speaker, we felt completely and totally alone.

It was extremely difficult to know which government department you were to go to and for what purpose. I mean, it was as bureaucratic a nightmare as you can possibly imagine.

One of the recommendations that Mr. Laing made that I very, very much appreciated, Mr. Speaker, was that that be cleaned up; that we do look at a way of consolidating those regulatory functions, of bringing them in to a single place, where when communities require assistance, they can go and then they can be further forwarded into specific areas if that's necessary.

But I know just prior to leaving the mayoralty, Mr. Speaker, what we eventually did out of frustration was we actually hired a private consultant. We hired a private consultant to come into our community and to do a full-blown assessment and analysis of all of our water treatment facilities, of our filter, of our filter media. And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we got the answers that we needed and we were able to do a lot of things.

As a matter of fact, once we knew what a lot of the problems were and we had that extremely technical expertise to be able to help us through it, a lot of that we were able to do ourselves and a lot of that we were able to do in a very, very cost-effective fashion.

And I understand that the current mayor and council of Porcupine have actually gone on from there and they've made some further additions and improvements. And I think they should be really congratulated for that. And I think there are a lot of communities in this province, Mr. Speaker, that have taken the bull by the horns. They have saved their money. They've sacrificed infrastructure elsewhere, but realizing how important quality drinking was to their citizens, they put the money, they put the effort into it.

But not all communities in this province, and I would dare say, Mr. Speaker, most communities in this province do not have that ability. After 10 years of this government those communities have had so many other costs off-loaded onto them. They've had their revenue sharing reduced down to nothing, Mr. Speaker. They have been victims of a deliberate

strategy by this government to depopulate small town Saskatchewan.

As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, they no longer have the ability to be able to accept the legal and the financial responsibilities that this government wants to absolve itself completely of and just blindly, blindly throw it back to the municipalities.

It was interesting listening to Mr. Mike Badham this weekend, Mr. Speaker, and some of his comments as a result of the inquiry report. He actually suggested that some communities could raise their water rates by 10 times and they still wouldn't come close to having the financial wherewithal to be able to do what needs to be done in their communities in order to be able to provide safe quality drinking water to their citizens, because they just don't have . . .

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

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank the hon. member for allowing me to introduce guests.

I draw the Assembly's attention to the west gallery: three young men — they're retired educators — and now present board members on different credit unions. From the right is Dan Palsich, who's a retired educator and member of the board for Lloydminster Credit Union; the fellow in the middle is Earl Nostbakken, who's a retired teacher and also board member for Biggar Credit Union; and the fellow on the left is my father, Angus Addley, who's a retired principal and board member for Saskatoon Credit Union. And coincidentally tomorrow he's celebrating the 29th anniversary of his 39th birthday tomorrow.

So would all hon. members please welcome the three guests today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

North Battleford Water Inquiry

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to understand the context that a lot of the issues around safe water have manifested themselves, Mr. Speaker. This government . . . this is all about responsibility, Mr. Speaker, all about responsibility. And Mr. Laing in his report uses that word over and over and over again.

And how did this government fail to meet its responsibility in terms of providing safe quality drinking water to the people of Saskatchewan? Because they started out 10 years ago attempting to evade all sorts of other responsibilities — by evading the responsibilities to their communities, to the municipalities, to revenue sharing, to assisting . . . to not off-loading costs that rightfully, Mr. Speaker, have been the

purview of the provincial government.

The deliberate and cynical attempt by this government to evade those responsibilities almost 10 years ago is what led them to the position where they eventually started making choices — another word that Mr. Laing uses in his report over and over again — start making choices in terms of decisions that they knew would ultimately impact the water supply and the quality of the water supply in this province negatively.

Now we've got communities that are struggling. We've got a government that has completely evaded its responsibility and now, Mr. Speaker, even after all of that and after 7,000 people got sick in North Battleford, they still — they still — refuse to accept responsibility.

They don't want to talk about the decisions that they made in terms of downsizing the budgets for the various water quality units. They don't want to talk about the decisions that they made in terms of reducing the number of inspectors. They don't want to talk about the power struggles that went on behind closed doors that led to some departments coming out winners, some coming out losers. And, Mr. Speaker, it would almost be laughable if it wouldn't have been so tragic. Because apparently the big losers in the power struggle were the people of North Battleford and the people of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management is a department that Mr. Laing looks at and he very carefully scrutinizes their role, Mr. Speaker, over the last 10 years. And I was actually stunned by some of the language that he . . . that he used when it came to, when it came to describing how it is that they had conducted themselves.

He uses words like ineffective, incapable. He also, in some ways, makes the department look like the poor cousin within government because at one point he actually suggests that the rest of government would not give SERM the authority to implement its mandate.

(14:30)

So, Mr. Speaker, the question is, what is it that went on internal to government that put the government department responsible for maintaining and managing water quality in this province on the back burner to the degree where they weren't even able to fulfill their mandate — their mandate, Mr. Speaker, that they have by law, through legislation?

There were a number of weaknesses too in terms of communication. I talked about this a little earlier, Mr. Speaker. But I think that when you talk about three or four different government departments sort of having varying degrees of responsibility in different areas of water quality, that very obviously led to part of the difficulty in North Battleford. And Mr. Laing quite correctly points that out.

And part of that was municipalities didn't know where to go in their times of need. But yet by the same token, SERM then wasn't able to develop a system whereby they could identify municipalities or where they could follow through in situations where maybe they had identified problems, and ensure that they had been rectified.

And one of the comments that Mr. Laing makes, Mr. Speaker, is the absence of a flagging system that would allow SERM to detect municipalities who do not comply with the requirements for submitting water samples is a serious shortcoming in its monitoring capability.

And I know last session, Mr. Speaker, in response to a written question around the compliance rates in the province, I was very surprised at the number of communities who had extremely poor compliance rates. And I guess I asked the question, was there a breakdown in communication where perhaps the communities didn't even know what their obligations were, that they didn't realize the requirements, they didn't realize the time frames within which they had to submit samples. I don't know, Mr. Speaker — perhaps there are even some communities out there who didn't even realize that they were required to submit samples.

But at the end of the day, SERM, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, had absolutely no way of determining who those communities were. And you know, when you think about one of Mr. Justice Laing's first findings and that was that the city of North Battleford hadn't been inspected by a Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management inspector for 10 years prior to the outbreak, I guess then I can understand why there were so many communities out there with such poor compliance rates.

If there wasn't someone out there who was interested, and maybe taking a drive out there at least once in 10 years, then it's extremely difficult, Mr. Speaker, to fault the community as well, and its citizens, if they didn't know what the requirements were.

Now when SERM chose to withdraw, and it ended up being in a position where it couldn't manage water quality in Saskatchewan, and where it couldn't develop a communications system with the communities — and with other departments of government I might add as well, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I guess what I find particularly troubling is that it was Treasury Board who, with the responsibility that they have, Mr. Speaker, who were aware of SERM's choice to withdraw from the water quality management program, and from management of water treatment plants throughout 1990s, and they realized that SERM would not be meeting its legislated mandate to do all of the things that needed to be done in order to ensure safe quality drinking water.

And this perhaps may be naive, Mr. Speaker, but how is it that a government department just so easily abandons its legal responsibilities, its legislative mandate? How does it do that?

I can understand decisions being made in the interest of efficiency, and a number of other things, Mr. Speaker, but how can decisions that aren't going to allow the department to fulfill this legislative mandate; how are those decisions made?

And I think at some point, Mr. Speaker, when people come to realize just the degree to which this government has been responsible for the water quality problems and issues in this province — and the degree to which they were responsible for the situation in North Battleford, Mr. Speaker — I think that at

some point they will, they will in fact pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I think surprised everyone as well was that two years ago — or last session, excuse me — we had a cabinet decision item leaked to us that had all of this in it. Almost all of the findings from Mr. Justice Laing's report were almost drawn right out of the cabinet decision item — or were, as a result . . . the findings were as a result of warnings from other government departments, from the various departments' own officials, a lot of that.

And it's interesting to note that they understood what their responsibilities were. They walked away from them.

Then their own department officials — being professionals, Mr. Speaker, wanting to do their job properly, and being people who care about what they do, being people who care about water quality in this province — these officials put together a document and warned the government that if they continued to ignore this issue . . .

And right on the front page of that cabinet decision item, Mr. Speaker, was a sentence that still stands out for me today. And it was that if they continued to ignore this issue, we could potentially be facing a Walkerton-type situation in Saskatchewan.

I find that absolutely incredible, Mr. Speaker. And I was asked on the weekend by someone, well does this mirror a lot of what did happen in Walkerton? And certainly there are a large number of similarities, Mr. Speaker. But so far . . . And no one has been able to correct me on this, Mr. Speaker, but as I understand it the one thing that the Government of Ontario didn't have — didn't have — was a full-blown cabinet decision item warning them two years prior to Walkerton.

This government had that, provided by their own officials, spelling out all of the problems that they would face if they didn't make some decisions and they didn't take a serious look at their role, their legal role, in water quality in this province. And they didn't. They ignored it.

And, Mr. Speaker, we ended up with 7,000 people in North Battleford being sick because they deliberately ignored the warnings.

Mr. Laing, or, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Laing's report, Justice Laing's report also . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. I would ask members to take their argument outside of this room if they wish to yell in that manner.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well sadly enough — sadly enough, Mr. Speaker — I don't think we have to go through the history of this particular issue any more. I think it is now extremely well understood between the government's own cabinet decision item, between Justice Laing's report.

I think everyone understands the decisions that this government made and I think everyone understands that they very clearly abrogated their responsibilities. Now where do we go from

here? What about the fallout, Mr. Speaker?

Well they came up with a response, Mr. Speaker, and what was particularly interesting, Mr. Speaker, was that that response was nothing different than what we've been hearing from this government since two weeks after the original cryptosporidium outbreak in North Battleford. Nothing different, Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing.

They reduced one budget prior to the report; now they've taken that amount of money, they've put it somewhere else; oh we've got the problem solved. Well, Mr. Speaker, they don't have the problem solved. And the way that they expect the problem to be solved is by making it someone else's problem.

Mr. Speaker, in North Battleford on Friday, it was particularly interesting to talk with some of the residents — some of the residents who were actually able to make it to the press conference, because the other thing about the press conference, Mr. Speaker, is that very few people actually knew when and where it was. Very few people actually knew when and where it was. One almost has to wonder if this wasn't some type of deliberate strategy to limit the exposure.

But those residents that did make it, Mr. Speaker, had some very, very interesting comments. And some of them were extremely angry — extremely angry. I remember one gentleman in particular that after having listened to the press conference, and looking at the promotional material that the government had provided around the room, he was just frustrated. And actually, this gentleman was later on quoted in *The Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker. And here's his reaction to the response. I quote:

They just sat down, took a deck of cards, shuffled them around, and said here is your new plan.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there was a single citizen of North Battleford that was the least bit impressed with the government's response — not a single one.

Now we've got other residents who've been equally critical to the point where they're saying they don't trust their water any more, Mr. Speaker, and they certainly don't trust this NDP government any more. And, Mr. Speaker, they probably don't have much reason to trust them.

But as well as a few million dollars that they're sort of putting back — they've taken from somewhere else, Mr. Speaker — what's the other response to the water quality issues in this province, Mr. Speaker? Well it's about as typical as typical can be coming from a bunch of socialists.

They're setting up — they're setting up — another Crown corporation. Mr. Laing suggested they consolidate some of the regulatory function within a single department, some of the . . . There were a number of other things that they do.

(14:45)

And what did these folks see, Mr. Speaker, but just an excellent opportunity to set up another Crown corporation — a Crown corporation to manage the recommendations and the

implementation of those recommendations from the government. Absolutely incredible, Mr. Speaker. If there was ever a basic function of government — and in this case it's a legal responsibility — it's to provide good quality, safe drinking water to its citizens.

But no, we have to set up another Crown corporation. They can't consolidate and streamline the regulatory function, implement the recommendations, without bigger government, without more government. My God, Mr. Speaker, you only have to wonder, if 10,000 people would have gotten sick, would it have been two Crown corporations?

This is about as ridiculous as it gets. They need to get their feet back on the ground. They need to figure out what it is that they are responsible for in terms of the provision of good quality, safe drinking water in this province. They need to give a department of government the ability to be able to do that and then they need to go out and they need to do it, Mr. Speaker.

But they can't expect communities and ratepayers to accept and absorb those kinds of responsibilities while they're forcing them to shrink more and more. They have reduced the population — the numbers are all there, Mr. Speaker, of this province, particularly small town Saskatchewan — and those communities just don't have that ability.

Mr. Speaker, they certainly have the will, they certainly have the will. They certainly would very much like to be able to do everything that they can to provide safe drinking water to their citizens. But without the resources, without support — without support they can't do that. They don't have the finances, Mr. Speaker.

And another interesting observation from Friday afternoon, Mr. Speaker, was that as well as setting up a new Crown corporation, as well as further bureaucratizing the entire issue, Mr. Speaker, what's the other thing that they did? Well, they kind of turned Sask Water into something akin to a consulting firm.

So now we've got a Crown that is going to take the communities of this province, it's going to . . . saying that it can provide service to them, but only unless they haul out their cheque book, Mr. Speaker. So not only do we have the whole business of now we've got the legal costs and we got the financial costs that the government expects the communities to completely absorb, Mr. Speaker, but now if they make a phone call and they want to ask a question or two, they're going to have to pay the new high price consulting firm of Sask Water Inc. for that information.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely incredible to think about how, after as damning an indictment as the Laing report was, that this government has the audacity to turn around and say to the communities you will now bear all of the financial costs of water quality in this province, you will bear the legal responsibilities for water quality in this province, and not only that, but if you want our help, you will pay for it.

And, Mr. Speaker, that leads me to the motion. And at this point, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read the motion to the Assembly. It reads as follows:

That this Assembly calls on the provincial government to accept its responsibility of the North Battleford water crisis and to put forward a clear plan for provincial action to manage and regulate safe water that does not off-load a majority of the responsibilities and costs onto communities and ratepayers.

The motion is seconded by the member from North Battleford, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the water crisis hit my community last spring, I think it is fair to say that most of the citizens of North Battleford took the view that it was more important to get on with the work of fixing the problem than to assign blame and to point fingers. And that was my initial concern as well, that the inquiry might do little more than point fingers and actually delay action to fix the problem.

I'm pleased actually, though, that I think the inquiry has provided a blueprint for a way to move forward. I think it's also fair to say that most of the citizens in my community decided not to participate in the court action on the grounds that suing the city and suing the province would not solve the problem and get the infrastructure of North Battleford in terms of water treatment and waste water back to a standard where it needs to be.

Well I think that, while there was admittedly some anger in North Battleford, the primary, the primary reaction in North Battleford was, let's get on with the business of fixing the problem.

But last Friday in the wake of the minister's announcement — or I should say non-announcement — there was universal anger in North Battleford. And I want to read just two, I want to read just two statements from Mr. Justice Laing's report, the first on page 223:

The choice was made (referring to the choice to cut the budget of the Environment department, the choice was made) knowing (that) the result would be a reduction in the overall quality of drinking water in the province.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, this wasn't something that merely happened — one of those unintended, unfortunate circumstances and incidents that could not have been foreseen. Mr. Justice Laing made a finding that the provincial government made a knowing decision to reduce the number of inspectors, to reduce the budget of the department, knowing that a reduction in the quality of drinking water would be the result.

Also on page 226, Mr. Justice Laing made the following finding, that:

The lack of inspection by . . . (the Department of the Environment) of the North Battleford . . . water treatment plant for ten years prior to 2001 had a direct bearing on the events of April, 2001.

So there is a direct finding of responsibility. A direct finding that the province made knowing actions which had a direct causal link to the crisis which overtook our community last April.

Well, in the minister's announcement on Friday, we had an announcement that the department will take its regulatory responsibilities more seriously and there will be more inspections. I congratulate the government for that.

We also have an announcement that they will take their responsibility for a watershed protection more seriously. I congratulate the department and the government on that.

However, when it came to the crucial question as to whether there would be any help for the municipalities to upgrade their water treatment systems in this province, the answer was a resounding no. Indeed, the minister used the term partnership. He used the word partnership, but when he was pressed what partnership meant, he made it abundantly clear that the word partnership means absolutely nothing because what is offered to municipalities is the prospect of criminal prosecution. Criminal prosecution if they don't do the necessary upgrading to their water systems, but in terms of money from the province — zero.

Now, I hear some of the members opposite saying, well, that's not right. Well the minister did try and say that the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program was a response to the water program. But of course, Mr. Speaker, that's totally false.

The infrastructure program initiated by the federal government was in place before the water crisis. It was in no way a response to the water crisis overtaking this province. It was all monies that were in place before and were going to be spent before.

So to say the 30 million from infrastructure is somehow a response to the water crisis — none of which, of course, is coming to North Battleford — is simply false. The infrastructure program was there before. It is not a response.

Threatening municipal leaders with criminal prosecution is not going to resolve in the upgrades we know need to be done. We also know that 43 communities in this province have precautionary drinking water advisories against them. Most of those communities are very small, and their mayors and councils are basically volunteer positions. So I wonder what impact it's going to have on mayors and councillors who are paid little or nothing to begin with, who are now told that the only help they can expect from the provincial government is: (1) consulting for which they will have to pay; and (2) the prospect that they could be in criminal court facing charges. That is not likely to expand our volunteer base in our small communities and throughout rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now on the inquiry itself. We spent \$2 million on the inquiry but we have nothing, nothing to help the city of North Battleford, nothing to help any of the communities facing precautionary drinking water orders.

It has been said in this Assembly that I was opposed to the inquiry. Well I certainly don't mind saying that I have throughout said it is more important to get on with the business of dealing with the problem than it is to get into the blame game. And also my fear was that the inquiry itself would delay action. Nothing would be done for a year because we were awaiting the inquiry.

Well now the inquiry is out and the government announced that they still won't be doing anything. So I guess maybe the delay only meant that it took a year for the government to tell us that there was no help. Instead of telling us a year ago there'd be no help they've now announced a year later there will be no help.

The government of course pleads poverty. Well, Mr. Speaker, I know and all members of this House know that indeed we are facing a very substantial price tag. I have heard the figure of 300 million for the entire province being used. That is a large amount.

We know that in North Battleford alone 1 million has been expended for the new ultraviolet treatment plant for the water treatment. We know that a new sewage treatment plant which is unquestionably required will be somewhere in the 12 to \$15 million range. Those are large figures for North Battleford and for the whole province.

But for the government to say they have absolutely zero, not one red cent to help, these pleas of poverty, Mr. Speaker, are undone when the government in its priorities or lack of priorities says we are happy to spend \$2 million on studying a problem, we will spend nothing on fixing it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what does need to be done? This past summer my wife and I were in the province of Newfoundland and we enjoyed our visit to many of the smaller communities in that province. And as we know, Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland is another province which has been economically disadvantaged.

(15:00)

Many of the smaller communities we visited had boil-water orders posted around the community. And I remember asking in one of our stops how long that boil-water order had been there, and the woman behind the counter couldn't remember; it was just something that was always there. In other words, those communities simply do not have safe water.

That underlines the point for Saskatchewan, as for Newfoundland, that we need national standards. We need a new water infrastructure program on the national level. Saskatchewan should be pushing for a new national water infrastructure program — that should be the position of our provincial government — that will have to be cost-shared by all levels of government.

They should quit this dishonest charade of saying the existing infrastructure program is a response to the water crisis, because clearly it is not. The mere time frame says it is not. And instead they should come to the table and say, we need all levels of government in a new national water standards agreement, and a new national water treatment infrastructure program.

Mr. Speaker, Canada has some 20 per cent of the world's fresh water — 20 per cent of the world's fresh water, less than 1 per cent of the world's population. We should be the last country in the world to have drinking water concerns.

Nature has blessed us more than any other country in the entire world with more fresh water per capita by far than any other nation on earth. We are defined by our great rivers and our great

lakes. And so it is a national shame that we, of all countries, are now in the position of safe drinking water not being a right of all Canadians no matter where they live.

And safe drinking water will only be a right if our government pushes for a new program contributed to by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments — yes, and by the consumers.

I would like to say that while I disagreed with most of what we heard from the minister for Sask Water last week, I do agree that we, as consumers, as water users, are going to have to be prepared as well to do our part to say we value clean, safe water coming to our homes and we recognize that that is going to require a contribution from us as well.

But, Mr. Speaker, the atmosphere on Friday in North Battleford was one of anger, was one that we have been ignored, we have been insulted. It was goodbye, good luck, and the minister was gone.

A government which says it has no money, no money to deal with problems, has \$2 million to study the problem, zero to fix it; it has \$111,000 to hire a person with dubious qualification and dubious responsibilities. These things undermine the government's claim that it cannot assist municipalities. We need more assistance for our municipalities than simply to threaten them with criminal prosecution and then to offer them consulting services for which they will be required to pay.

When the inquiry was called, the Premier said it was because of their concern for the situation in North Battleford. But then the lawyers for the province at the inquiry spent the entire inquiry denying that the province had any responsibility. And they simply repeated again and again and again that water quality is no concern and no province and . . . of the government, but rather of municipalities. So this alone left many people wondering why the province had called the inquiry if their only position at the inquiry was that this had nothing to do with them.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, again and again throughout the inquiry that was the position put to Mr. Justice Laing by the people representing the provincial government, was to simply do the Pontius Pilate routine of washing their hands and saying, the province is not involved.

And that denial of responsibility was not accepted by Mr. Justice Laing in his report. He clearly laid much of the blame at the feet of the provincial government. Yet in spite of that, the response of the provincial government on Friday was to offer consulting for which municipalities would have to pay, the threat of criminal prosecution against municipal leaders, and beyond that no help at all. Mr. Speaker, that simply is not adequate.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to enter into debate on this very crucial issue and speak to some of the concerns that I'm sure all of us in this Assembly share or we should share.

Mr. Speaker, I heard members opposite using the words responsibility. Well, Mr. Speaker, in sitting here and listening to

some of the debate, responsibility entered my mind as each and every one of us having been elected to collectively ensure that any problems and issues that our constituents sent us to discuss are debated and are discussed for a common solution, not to point fingers and lay blame.

And, Mr. Speaker, if I recall, the purpose of the inquiry which people had called for and Premier Calvert had ordered — the Premier had ordered — the purpose of that was not to lay blame but to determine why what happened happened. We have the results of those findings and we're very, very pleased to accept the recommendations that the Justice has brought forward. The inquiry was not to lay blame. It was to determine why it happened. The responsibility . . . And he also indicated what measures should be put in to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

But we can't seem to get all the members in tune here to realize that that's our responsibility collectively as elected members from our constituents. We're sent here on their behalf to collectively solve any problems or serious issues facing our communities throughout the entire province. Not to holler at one another here and point fingers and say it's all your fault. We can do that on every issue.

What's happened in the past has happened. We have . . . An inquiry was carried out, recommendations for certain measures to be put in place to make sure it doesn't happen again. And we should collectively be working towards that and not trying to determine whether or not it's your fault or my fault or somebody else's fault.

Collectively, we have to accept that responsibility as elected members of this Legislative Assembly. It's not the views from the past, but it's looking towards the future, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well it is kind of unbelievable, as the member from Swift Current says. Unbelievable, certainly it is. I mean, it's easy to blame. It's so easy to criticize, but not be able to come up with any solutions. That's the easiest thing in the world, Mr. Speaker.

Well there is a plan, Mr. Speaker. There has been response, there has been a response . . . there has been a response to what has occurred. I'd just like to put this into some context, Mr. Speaker, and without nobody's . . . nobody anywhere should be shirking any kind of responsibility.

But let me just point out, municipal and waterworks owners have the primary role in providing safe drinking water and have always carried this responsibility. That's first and foremost, Mr. Speaker. Contravention of any environmental Act or regulation has always been potentially subject to prosecution. The member from North Battleford should know that; he should know that, Mr. Speaker. Determination of the compliance and enforcement approach taken depends on the nature and the significance of a contravention.

The commissioner . . . and let's, let's qualify this and calm the waters a little bit because it's very easy again to suggest, as the member from North Battleford, we're going to be prosecuting all the local town councils' mayors and so on. That's not the case, Mr. Speaker. I think it's totally irresponsible of the member from North Battleford to even be suggesting that.

The commissioner recommended that an offence be created where the operator continues to operate the water treatment plant in contravention or contrary to the operational terms set out in the permit. The key is the word knowingly, Mr. Speaker, and the commissioner uses that word on purpose and is trying to address the situation where the operator purposely acts contrary to the permit.

To aid communities in the future, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan water utility will undertake with communities to develop solutions to their water supply and infrastructure needs. Water consumers would cover those costs on a fee-for-service basis, Mr. Speaker.

We've had some comments about the lack of assistance for communities in these kinds of situations. Well there are communities, Mr. Speaker, that have addressed their water issues and I'm pleased to name them, without any assistance from federal or provincial governments even prior to any infrastructure programs came to being. I'll tell you the ones that are though, member from Redberry Lake — Swift Current, Yorkton, Meota, Wawota, Indian Head.

Those communities saw the need for repairs to their infrastructure and they went ahead and did it before there were any kinds of assistance programs in place. And how they might have done it, how they might have done it is the same way that communities have taken the initiative to have capital projects underway through the Municipal Financing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, there are those communities that have accepted the responsibility, as I outlined earlier, to ensure their infrastructure and their water supply system was safe. Obviously members here are not aware of the Municipal Financing Corporation.

I've raised this issue and I would suspect and expect that those people, those communities that I mentioned, who took it on themselves when they saw that, well we should maybe upgrade our infrastructure as it relates to water, took the initiative, no help, no financing, no infrastructure programs, went ahead and did it.

And how they might have done it is approach the Municipal Financing Corporation, determined what costs they required, and on the long-term basis made a loan from this corporation to assist them in mortgaging whatever repairs were required.

That corporation of Saskatchewan was established in 1969, Mr. Speaker, under the authority of The Municipal Financing Corporation Act, and its purpose is to assist in making capital funds available for the financing of sewer and water, school and other essential construction and local improvement projects by municipalities and school divisions.

Now there is a limit in borrowing from this corporation. That corporation allows local authorities to minimize interest costs by offering extremely competitive interest rates and the ability to repay debt prior to maturity. In addition, the Municipal Financing Corporation offers very, very flexible borrowing terms that can be customized to meet the needs of the project being financed.

The interest rate charged by that corporation depends on the terms of the debt and current interest rate levels. But the interest rate is a sum of the province of Saskatchewan's costs of borrowing plus a small amount to cover MFC's (Municipal Financing Corporation of Saskatchewan) administrative costs.

Now the Financing Corporation is authorized to finance up to 50 per cent of the total authorized borrowings of a capital project except, except, Mr. Speaker, for sewer and water projects, which can be up to 100 per cent of authorized borrowing.

Now during 1998-99 the province and the municipalities . . . there was an infrastructure program, provincial municipal infrastructure program, \$10 million per year.

In 2000 the federal government came on board and agreed to sign a tri-partite agreement that would allow something like \$170 million federal-provincial money to flow through over a five-year period to talk about fixing local roads, infrastructure. At least 50 per cent of all those projects that people apply for will be directed to rural projects.

(15:15)

Mr. Speaker, just on that note, Saskatchewan's share of the federal funding will be \$56.7 million over the next five-year period. The program in the first year was considered to be a success, Mr. Speaker, and it's continuing this year. There are a number of projects with a priority being given to those communities that applied for help to fix their infrastructure and are under boil-water advisories get the highest priorities. And those communities do receive help in the form of funding from the province and the federal government.

On the matter of North Battleford's situation, they had in fact — and I just want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that it should be recognized that grants from provincial and federal governments can only be part of the solution and that those resources are limited — hence I'm sure that those Municipal Financing Corporation loans, and people that accessed those monies to ensure upgrading of their facilities and their major projects, were made available to them, recognizing that funds under particular targeted programs are limited.

North Battleford's been a . . . have been assisted in upgrading their water and sewage infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Their 2001-2002 application for two new wells in the amount of \$254,970 from this particular federal-provincial government program, was reviewed and approved under that Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program. The total cost was \$394,000.

When the problem became apparent in that part of the country, an additional \$500,000 of federal and provincial funding from this Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program was approved for a second project to install ultraviolet disinfection equipment and to upgrade the filtration and monitoring processes, and that was funded through a strategic project.

Mr. Speaker, those monies . . . North Battleford still has access to \$950,000 from this kind of a program in addition to a number of other communities who will have access and who have

applied and who have had their projects reviewed, and the priority is given to those that are critical in nature and those that require immediate attention.

Mr. Speaker, above and beyond that, we have communities that have been working with our Sask Water utility and obtaining their advice and direction on perhaps what's the best way to address their immediate problems. And there are a number of those small communities throughout the province that have utilized the expertise that exists from the engineers and the technicians within Sask Water utility, Mr. Speaker, and as I speak to the Assembly here today, we have those technicians dealing with communities and addressing those kinds of problems, and particularly where it deals with water quality.

So it is not something, Mr. Speaker, that's been taken trivially by this coalition government, Mr. Speaker. It's been something that's been seriously addressed and not trivialized nor has it been made an attempt to play petty politics with something as serious as a water quality throughout this great province of ours.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of communities that require help, and they are being helped. Perdue is, as we speak, member from Saskatchewan Rivers, Perdue is being helped. And they are one of the small communities working very, very closely, member from Redberry Lake. You should check your facts . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I would just ask the member from Melville, the Minister for Government Relations, to direct his remarks to the Chair please.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I guess I should know that, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize. From now on I will, through you.

Those members from Saskatchewan Rivers and Redberry Lake should know full well, Mr. Speaker, if they checked their facts, that Sask Water has been working with the people in Perdue, even over the weekend, to try and address their concerns and their problems.

The province has been there for the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, through the initial program that the province and the municipalities shared, in assisting them with a variety of their needs in upgrading — whether it's been their roads, whether it's been upgrading their facilities. For the two first years, in '98 and '99, the \$10 million each year, shared with the municipalities, went a long ways to assist.

I heard one of the members earlier speaking about the drastic reductions to the revenue sharing. Well, Mr. Speaker, once again it's a matter of looking . . . thinking about what's happened in the past. Well we're not looking at the past; we're trying to make things better for the future. And I'm happy to see — and as a result of this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, the headlines in one of the local papers says, "Losing streak ends for municipality"— that we are working with them to try and assist them in every way possible.

It's just a little bit concerning, Mr. Speaker, when we do have people that are being criticized — and we talk about credibility — when we're being criticized and the government's being criticized for sitting on several hundred millions of dollars in

one breath and then in another breath being criticized for not having that money and saying that it's not there and it's never been there. I'm not sure.

The other credibility issue here is when you do, in a budget, initiate a program where you include a number of people, front-line people, Mr. Speaker, to work on various aspects like highways, water quality inspection in the different plants, and they vote against it. Even the member from North Battleford would vote against that kind of a budget, Mr. Speaker.

You have to ask . . . And again with the current budget, this year's budget, where there's additional money for municipalities, for health care, and a continuance for highways, and other programs, education — they vote against it, Mr. Speaker. I don't understand that. That's a credibility problem, I think.

And so I go back to what I started out with. And as I complete my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will be moving an amendment to the motion. But I again would just like to go back to trying to . . . I think folks forget why they're elected and why they're sent here — not to play party politics but to come up with solutions to the problems that we have back home in our constituencies.

And you know something, Mr. Speaker, we have to work together to do that. I mean the easiest thing in the world is to be critical. That's the easiest thing in the world, but to come up with constructive solutions to some of our problems, that's what the folks back home expect us to be doing here. Not hollering and screaming at one another but to come up with solutions to their problems that we are responsible for ensuring that we address to the best of our ability and the best interests of the communities at large, and the best interests of this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Southeast:

That all words after the word "Assembly" be deleted and replaced with the following:

Endorse the provincial government's acceptance of the recommendations of Justice Laing and respond with a clear plan of action that improves the regulatory system and works co-operatively with municipalities and First Nations to secure a reliable source of safe drinking water in the future.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'm very pleased to be able to enter into this debate and to speak as Minister of the Environment on this very important matter.

And if members will forgive me a slight pun, this is indeed I think a watershed debate that we are having here today. Because quite clearly what we are seeing is the difference between the philosophy and values and approach of members on this side of the House versus the blame-throwing and

irresponsible pitter-patter that happens on the other side of the House.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we have seen in this House over the last 10 years a political philosophy emanating from the members opposite who first of all called themselves Conservatives, and then Liberals, and then Saskatchewan Party. And I don't know if they have yet another problem within their leadership, which it certainly appears that they may have. They'll probably have to reinvent themselves again.

But what we've seen is a clear difference in emphasis on this side of the House and that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the opposition, what are they saying constantly? Tax cuts, tax cuts, tax cuts. At all and at any cost, they want tax cuts. Mr. Speaker, they believe fundamentally that government is bad, that government is intrusive, government has no role.

And then, Mr. Speaker, when it suits their convenience, all of a sudden they want to stand up and say, government should be Santa Claus, and government should immediately find all sorts of money — I don't know where, because they want to get rid of all the tax base — but government should find money to do anything in a knee-jerk fashion.

Mr. Speaker, when my party formed government in 1991 we understood that there was a clear fiscal mess that we had to clean up. And we, Mr. Speaker, we acted decisively to deal with the excesses of the Devine government. We acted to clean up the debt and the deficit.

Just think, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't had to spend between 650 and \$900 million a year on interest costs, what kinds of programs we could have implemented that would have responded to today's Santa Claus request that the opposition is making.

Mr. Speaker, we moved in the '90s to clean up their fiscal mess. And now in this first decade of the 21st century, Mr. Speaker, we are enlarging on that. We've got stability in terms of our financial house and now, Mr. Speaker, we are moving to deal with the problems that we were unable to deal with as effectively and as expansively as we might have wished in the early '90s.

Mr. Speaker, we are fixing the roads. We recognized that there was a problem and we moved to fix the roads. Mr. Speaker, we recognized there was a problem with the health care system and we are fixing the health care system. Mr. Speaker, we know that there are problems with the water system in this province and we are moving to fix the water system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of sadness that the Premier of this province heard about the problems in North Battleford. And indeed we continue to be saddened by the experiences that the citizens of North Battleford went through around Easter last year. It was very . . . a very difficult time for a great number of the citizens of North Battleford and the people who travelled through during that

unfortunate time.

So at this point I do want to say very clearly, Mr. Speaker, our heart goes out to those people who unfortunately drank the water that clearly had the genotype 1 cryptosporidium in it which resulted in some illnesses that they experienced. I do want to give my sympathy, and I believe all of government's sympathy, to those people who experienced the illnesses and to their family members who were affected by the illnesses. We hope that through the improvements that we plan to implement, Mr. Speaker, that no other community will have to go through that kind of a period of difficulty and illness.

(15:30)

Mr. Speaker, I do want to, at this point, also thank Justice Laing for responding very promptly to the request by the Premier to implement a commission of inquiry. He conducted himself in an extremely professional manner. Indeed, as all of us who know Bob Laing personally would say, he conducted himself as we would have expected. But it was his even-handed, judicious, and thoughtful response to what he was hearing that has brought us to this point where we are able to consider his report.

And I understand that some 3,000 copies of his report, the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the safety of the public drinking water in the City of North Battleford, Saskatchewan*, I understand some 3,000 copies of this have been printed. And I hope that all members of this Assembly and anyone who has an interest in water matters will take the time, will obtain a copy of this report, and read it through in its entirety.

It's extremely detailed, goes through and talks about the North Saskatchewan River, gives very clear scientific information about the cryptosporidium, talks about guidelines, standards, and permits, talks in very specific detail about the North Battleford plants department, and then does an excellent job of gathering together in one place all the policies, guidelines, procedures, and practices related to drinking water prior to April 2001, and then goes in and gives us several recommendations, Mr. Speaker — in total, 28 recommendations — which we will be acting upon. I want to emphasize that. We will be acting upon them.

We called the commission of inquiry in order to learn what happened in North Battleford and to receive recommendations from the commissioner in order to improve all aspects of drinking water delivery, Mr. Speaker.

We're not simply focused on the North Battleford specific issue, though of course as I said, our heart does go out to those people who suffered as a result of drinking that contaminated water. But we are concerned as well about ensuring that the system is improved all across Saskatchewan for all citizens of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we did not stand idly by and wait for Justice Laing to report. Immediately that we realized that there was a problem, we moved and we acted very quickly.

And members of the opposition like to howl when we remind them of it, but I'm going to say it again. We asked in the last

budget last year, we put in the budget the require . . . the resources for 15 new positions to deal with water issues in this province. This was in advance of the Laing inquiry report.

Fifteen positions, Mr. Speaker — 11 water inspectors in the old Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management department, now called Saskatchewan Environment, and four workers for the provincial lab. Fifteen workers in total, Mr. Speaker, to assist and improve our water capability.

And what did the members opposite do? They voted against it. As a matter of fact, what they did was they said that our budget with that improved water responsiveness, they called our budget a slap in the face to every Saskatchewan taxpayer from a government that has completely lost touch with the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it is the opposition that has lost touch with the people of Saskatchewan. The slap in the face is the slap that they deserve for trying to play politics with people's health and with water delivery.

Mr. Speaker, we focused on solutions. The purpose of the inquiry was to find out what went . . . what happened in North Battleford and then to use that information to improve the water program all across the province.

The report contained many positives and many negatives for all parties involved. We understand that. We are dealing with the recommendations though, Mr. Speaker, and we are dealing with them in a strong and forthright, proactive manner.

Mr. Speaker, we listened to what the people of Saskatchewan and in particular the people of North Battleford had to say about water. We've heard what Justice Laing had to say as he worked on his commission of inquiry. We listened, we heard, and, Mr. Speaker, we acted. Twenty-eight recommendations and the government has accepted them.

The member from North Battleford is very good at feigning outrage and discovering an issue — perhaps two or three or four weeks or months late, but he's very good at the bombast. He is very good at bombast and indeed, Mr. Speaker, at hypocritical responses when it suits him. He says we're doing nothing. In fact, of the 28 recommendations, seven deal specifically with the city of North Battleford. Mr. Speaker, we concur in all seven of those recommendations.

One recommendation deals with the health districts and the establishment of sentinel pharmacies. Mr. Speaker, we concur in that recommendation.

The other 20 recommendations, Mr. Speaker, this government accepts and we will be acting on all 20 of those recommendations.

The member from North Battleford would have us believe that he is the great drinking water king of Saskatchewan; that he cares. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to simply quote from the Laing report which again I did encourage all members of this House to read.

But I would call members' attention first of all to pages 98 and

99 of the report. Mr. Speaker, in many ways this sad tale that happened in North Battleford is also the story of a worker understanding that things were not quite as he expected and as he wanted them to be, and so he attempted to blow the whistle.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Allen, who gave testimony before the Laing inquiry, tried to get his superiors to listen to the concerns he had about the safety of the North Battleford drinking water. And indeed, on September 20, 1999, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Allen went so far as to e-mail Dale Goldhawk of CTV (Canadian Television Network Limited) television with his concerns. And what did he say to Mr. Goldhawk? He said, quote:

I am having problems at work to get health and safety concerns addressed. Methods I have tried so far include approaching my supervisor, the City engineer, the City commissioner, the Mayor, a City counsellor, my union, Occupational Health and Safety . . . and even my local member of the legislature.

Prior to September 20, 1999, his local member of the legislature, the current member for North Battleford, had been contacted by a concerned worker at the North Battleford water treatment plant. And what happened? Absolutely nothing.

What happened, Mr. Speaker, was that this worker in question was labelled as negative and confrontational. And rather than the member for North Battleford dealing responsibly and responsively with the concerns expressed by this water treatment plant worker, he blew him off. He said no, doesn't matter. You're confrontational, you're negative.

Mr. Speaker, this same member, I would point out, was prior to election in this august chambers, Mr. Speaker, the current member for North Battleford was a member of city council in North Battleford during the 1990s.

And again, Mr. Speaker, I would refer members of this Assembly to pages 95 and 96 of the Laing report wherein Mr. McEwen, the city commissioner, comments; he made it clear that he was proud of the fact the city had absorbed his reductions without any increase in the mill rate. He said he was constantly striving for efficiencies within the various civic departments. And he was proud, Mr. Speaker, proud because he had been conditioned into this by the city council of which the current member for North Battleford is a member.

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

Mr. Hillson: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — What is the member's point of order?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is deliberately and dishonestly putting words in the commission's report that are not there.

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

In the first place, the matters under debate are matters that are debatable. It is not a point of order.

Secondly, I ask the member to withdraw his statement and to apologize for using the words, deliberately being dishonest. I ask the member for North Battleford to apologize and withdraw those statements.

Mr. Hillson: — I withdraw the reference to deliberately and dishonestly, but nonetheless it is incorrect.

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

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, you have just required the hon. member to withdraw the remarks, apologize to the House, and to do that unequivocally. Mr. Speaker, when I listened it was . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. I will just take care of it now and allow me to do so, please. I've heard the withdrawal but I have not heard the apology from the member. And I urge him to apologize without equivocation at this time.

Mr. Hillson: — I apologize but it is incorrect.

The Speaker: — Order. One more time. I'll just ask the member to apologize for his remarks.

Mr. Hillson: — I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I would at this time like to thank the member from North Battleford for his apology. And I also would like to apologize to him because in the heat and the passion of the debate, I did use the phrase he blew off the concerns, and I would like to withdraw that from the record because what I was trying to say, Mr. Speaker, was that the indication from the Laing testimony, as is printed in the Laing inquiry, clearly indicates that Mr. Allen, the junior operator at the North Battleford water treatment plant felt he received no help from all that list of people and including his local member of the legislature. As he says, even my local member of the legislature.

I apologize if I've hurt his feelings but, you know, there used to be somebody in this House that said if you throw a stone in the dark and the dog barks, you know you've hit the dog.

I want to further talk about on page 96 of the Laing inquiry, it does say that the city commissioner stated:

. . . that throughout the 1990s the City of North Battleford was one of the wealthiest cities in the province in terms of financial reserves on a per capita basis.

Mr. Speaker, the current member for North Battleford, the former city councillor for North Battleford may take issue with that, but it is stated clearly in black and white in the Laing report:

. . . North Battleford was one of the wealthiest cities in the province in terms of financial reserves on a per capita basis.

Mr. McEwen then goes on to say, and I quote again from page 96 of the Laing inquiry:

He admitted candidly that staffing of the plants department was frozen throughout the 1990s at the direction of city council who felt its mandate was to effect economies wherever possible.

Frozen at . . . because of the direction of city council.

(15:45)

Now, I understand the feigned hypocrisy from the member opposite, but it is time that we got to focusing on the solution rather than trying to throw blame or trying to, through some fancy words, pretend it's a matter of principle, when really what the member from North Battleford is concerned about is the money, not the principle.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are concerned about the principle. Mr. Speaker, we have done many things and are doing many things to ensure that the people of Saskatchewan have comfort and know that they have access to safe, clean drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, as I've already said, we are accepting all 20 recommendations addressed specifically at this government. We have established a watershed authority to improve co-ordination and to ensure that all people who are involved in the water piece get together, talk, share their knowledge, share their planning.

Mr. Speaker, we're making regulatory improvements because our priority is public health and safety.

Environment. The Department of Environment has a drinking water quality unit that we are establishing. We're making sure that there are enforceable standards for bacteriological and turbidity limits. We will be doing regular inspections, one to two compliance inspections per year. Health will be making improvements, municipal government will be.

Mr. Speaker, probably most importantly, we're ensuring that this issue will not go away. We will be requiring that there will be an annual report to the legislature so that all people of Saskatchewan will know just exactly what has happened with their water treatment plant in the preceding year.

We will be ensuring that the water treatment plants of this province are up to par.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do want to say I endorse the provincial government's actions, very strong, proactive, forward-looking actions, as a result of the Laing inquiry. And I do believe that we do have a clear plan of action that does improve the regulatory system and that works co-operatively with municipal governments and with First Nations to ensure a reliable source of safe drinking water for the people of Saskatchewan.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place in seconding the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd a great deal of pleasure to speak to the amendment and to the motion today. It's been a tragedy in North Battleford for the

people of North Battleford, the sickness and problems that individuals had.

It's also a tragedy for the business community in North Battleford. It affected their businesses, it's affected their tourism, and again it affected many people's health and welfare. And our thoughts really need to go out to those people because a number of them did suffer in fairly substantial ways.

But we need to take a look at the reasons behind the North Battleford situation. The water inquiry was held. Judge Laing did bring his recommendations down and the government today doesn't seem to want to take any responsibility for the water situation in North Battleford.

And it's very unfortunate that the government of the day who must take responsibility for the water situation in North Battleford and other communities in this province . . . If not this provincial government, who else would be responsible for the water safety of this province? There's only one answer and it has to be this NDP-Liberal coalition that is the government of the day.

And as Judge Laing said, there was choices to be made and unfortunately this NDP-Liberal coalition made the wrong choices. They've cut the Environment department's budget, they've ignored the health of the North Battleford residents in the past, and today what do we see their response to the recommendations — that they are deflecting criticism, deflecting responsibility to the local municipalities.

They are hiring more civil servants to do more inspections but when it comes down to the necessary funding for infrastructure, this NDP-Liberal coalition government is not stepping up and helping the citizens of this province and in particular the citizens of North Battleford.

I'd like to talk about a number of issues and a number of communities but one that comes to mind that's in Redberry Lake is the community of Perdue which has been going under a similar situation. And for three years running now, the community of Perdue has applied for the federal-provincial infrastructure program to upgrade their water treatment plant, and three years in a row they've been turned down, and it's very critical. This community needs to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade their community's water treatment plant and, as I mentioned, three years in a row they've been turned down.

And just recently, Mr. Speaker, the councillor that has been really working hard to try to get some funding from the various levels of governments to help with their upgrading of the treatment plant, has been notified by the federal-provincial infrastructure program and has been told in no uncertain terms not to even contact them anymore. He's not even to phone them about Perdue's water problems and to apply again for the federal-provincial infrastructure program. While they've been turned down three times, and I suspect they'll be turned down a fourth, but we hope for their sake that they won't be. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not helping their situation in any way. They've been really left out on their own.

And I would also like to mention the provincial government

speaks about going to Sask Water for help. Well, the only help that Sask Water will provide is consulting services, which the community of Perdue will have to pay for. And the Municipal Financing Corporation, they will offer communities like Perdue a loan.

Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this community cannot afford a loan. They have a deteriorating tax base. They have lost elevators which affected their tax base. It's mainly a rural area and, as we know, rural Saskatchewan is hurting at this time financially.

And I'd just like to quote from a letter from the village of Perdue, and it reads that they recently had a visit from the senior project engineer with Sask Water, and he toured the lift station and was made aware and agreed that there was many upgrading plans needed to be done. And:

He (was) . . . quite certain that if Occupational Health came out to view it, they would condemn it.

And that's his words. This is the words of the town administrator:

Our lift station is probably designed the same as many other small communities in that the working area below is very small. To come up to Occupational Health's standards for work in a confined area, the whole system would have to be redone (so as no other) . . . is no way to adapt . . . to what is required.

And, Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say some of the problems in the village of Perdue:

(And) In 1997 & 1998 . . . (the village) undertook a project to fix and expand . . . (the) sewage lagoon. The cost of . . . (that) project was in excess of \$85,000 and . . . (the village) did it with no funding from outside sources. In 1998 . . . (they) built . . . (an) elevator road which cost over \$12,000 . . . with no outside funding. In 1999 . . . (they) had a major water line break that ended up costing (the village of Perdue) \$35,000.00.

And this is all without any help from any other level of government. They took it upon themselves to do this. And it reads:

As you can see, our infrastructure is in serious need of upgrading. We are doing our best but with . . . (our) continually shrinking tax base, (our) elevators are scheduled for demolition this spring) (and) we must have assistance with funding from some other source.

Signed by Pam McMahan, the administrator for the village of Perdue.

So you can see by that example that communities are doing their best with what they have — they are. They are working very hard. They understand the problems that they have with their water treatment situation, their wells, and so on. But they need some help from this provincial government to upgrade some of the major costs that has to take place with their water treatment plant, their wells, and so on and so forth.

As a side note, the third refusal by the federal-provincial infrastructure program came on a Friday. And the next Monday one of the two village's wells collapsed. And they were in desperate need of water and they did some minor repairs and did get, did get it going again. But they're going to have to dig at least one well, maybe two wells in the foreseeable future to get just water, let alone the adequate water.

And the village of Perdue has, has in the past have had some very poor water quality. And just to quote from the councillor from the village of Perdue.

Mr. Bott said . . . (the) community of Perdue needs a new water treatment plant . . . their water is awful. Their plant is . . . rotting and the quality of their water is just gross.

And it goes on to say that, you know, the village of Perdue needs a water treatment plant and needs everything — plumbing, new pumps, pipes, clean tanks, new filters, so on and so forth.

And I'd like to quote from a letter that was written by Dale Bonke, the Environment minister, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. And the letter, he says:

Dear Mayor and Council:

Water Treatment Plant Problems

In my November 30, 2000 letter to you, I recommended that the Village hire a water treatment plant consultant to audit the plant, suggest ways to improve the . . . (portability) of your . . . (treatment) water supply, and apply/ (and) find the resources to correct the problems identified. It is my understanding that the Village has followed through on (all) my recommendations but to date has not acquired sufficient funding to fix the problems. As a result, the situation has now reached a critical level.

By way of this letter, I strongly urge council to use every means possible to acquire the necessary funding to correct your water quality problems. Failure to correct these problems immediately could result in serious safety issues for your citizens and liable issues for (the) council.

Signed by the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management environment officer.

This is very disturbing news and to be turned down again. And it seems that the only communities that are even considered to get help for infrastructure is communities that have had a boil-water advisory. And the town of . . . the village of Perdue has not had that. They have very poor water and . . . but it just shows that . . . how bad the water in a community has to get before the provincial government will step forward and try to do something about it.

And this speaks directly to what happened in North Battleford. How bad did it have to get in North Battleford before some steps were taken? Well it had to get extremely bad and it actually put people's health at risk.

Mr. Speaker, this whole situation that the member opposite

spoke about — the Saskatchewan Party's plan to cut taxes — she misses a very fundamental point. If we had a robust economy in this province, if we had a growing economy as outlined by the Saskatchewan Party's plan to grow Saskatchewan, we would have the expanding businesses in this province; we would have a larger tax base; we would have a growing population; we have more workers in this province. At the end of the day what we'd have is more tax revenue for the government of the day to spend on infrastructure programs — for highways, for hospitals, for schools, and for water treatment plants and upgrading infrastructure in communities. But this government doesn't see it that way.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is lagging behind other areas of the government. We are losing jobs; we are losing businesses. And it's only going to increase the strains on our infrastructure program because we do not have a growing economy and a growing province like we need so desperately.

(16:00)

Another issue that surrounds that is the government's plans and talk of rural revitalization and the bus tour that the Premier and the government went on last summer. They go into a community, and they were in Perdue. They were in Perdue. And they heard about the problems of the water situation in Perdue. I suspect they didn't drink any of the water while they were there; they were only there 15, 20 minutes and left.

But as the bus tour went around Saskatchewan, they heard from people what the concerns were and they always said, oh well, we'll look into it. And in each case that I've heard, when they went through Redberry Lake constituency, they said, well we'll look into it, but never did do anything about it.

And when you look at rural revitalization, as the whole economy of Saskatchewan, in order for municipalities and villages and towns to have the adequate money to upgrade their infrastructure program, they need a growing community. They need more jobs. They need more taxes being paid by a growing economy which would give those local governments the added revenue to improve their infrastructure that they so desperately need to do.

Mr. Speaker, in North Battleford the people there have borne the brunt of the problems that this government has allowed to happen. And we must be very careful that this situation does not happen again in other communities, like it happened in North Battleford. And the villages and towns of this province realize that they need to do something, but what they need to do is get a little bit of help from their provincial government to help in their situation with their local infrastructure and particularly their water problems and their water treatment plants.

This government does not accept any responsibility for the water situation in this province and unfortunately they've never had a clear plan put forth to deal with it. All they're saying now is that they're going to manage and regulate the water system. But the communities of this province need more than just to be . . . just have more regulation and management dumped on them.

What they need is help, financial help, through

federal-provincial infrastructure program or any other program that the government can come up with. Because we're dealing with people's lives and their health and it's not their fault that the provincial government continues to off-load the majority of the responsibility and the financial costs onto communities and the local ratepayers. And, Mr. Speaker, I would just like, in summing up, that I will not be supporting the amendment, but I will support the motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And certainly it's my pleasure to enter in the debate today on water quality in the province of Saskatchewan.

I'd just like to say, right from the start, that I will be supporting the amendment put forward by the member from Melville and I won't be supporting the main motion, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about the problems that we've seen with regard to the situation in North Battleford and how it came to be that cryptosporidium got into the municipal waterworks in North Battleford, this is indeed a tragedy, a serious occurrence in this province, Mr. Speaker. And I don't think anyone should be saying that it isn't, because this government has taken this issue extremely seriously.

But when we look at how this happened and we look at how the municipality of North Battleford gets its water from surface water, from the river, and how it comes into their water treatment plant, and some of the concerns that happened with regard to filtration of cryptosporidium, it wasn't so much the level of chlorine or the fact that the chlorine wasn't monitored, but it had to do with the filtration blanket that was interrupted and not properly dealt with.

Now these issues came out with regard to Justice Laing and it indicated that cryptosporidium, because of this filtration blanket failure, got into the water system in North Battleford. And people who assume that this water was clear, fresh, and safe, was not and people got sick, Mr. Speaker. And I think all of us agree that that should not have happened. It should not have happened, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about why it happened, we can see problems. And Justice Laing has indicated where those problems occurred. He's indicated that there was perhaps not so much things to point at in terms of blame, but there seemed to be a sort of a, just a lack of recognition that water was important and that maintaining good, safe drinking water was extremely important and it required the alertness of a whole host of people, Mr. Speaker.

And we talk about, you know, perhaps some failures in the municipal system and we talk about source water, you know, from our surface water, from the river, and we talk about sewage treatment and the fact that the sewage treatment plant was located upstream from the intake for the water system. We can talk about all of these things, but what they've done, Mr. Speaker, is they've highlighted problem areas that need to be addressed.

And what this government has done, immediately when we

became aware, is we called for this inquiry and now we have the report — a very intensive report. And I commend Justice Laing on his report because it really did deal with the depth of water concerns in the province of Saskatchewan.

So this government has accepted close to 30 of these recommendations. But we didn't just accept them; we started a process of dealing with some of these concerns some time ago, Mr. Speaker.

Last year in our budget we hired additional water quality in both SERM and within the Health department to deal with some of the issues that were at hand, Mr. Speaker. So even though this report has just come out, what the government has done in terms of a response has been out there for some time.

And what we have done in our plan is we plan to do more. And just to talk a little bit about what we're planning to do and our response, Mr. Speaker, let's just talk about the principles of long-term safe drinking water strategy and the vision: a sustainable, reliable, safe, and clean supply of drinking water that is valued by the citizens of Saskatchewan.

Now the principles that we have is the strategy must be responsive to the needs of all citizens. Human health is the primary concern. Preventing risks to drinking water quality, including meeting the national drinking water quality guidelines, is a high priority. Transparency and clear lines of accountability and responsibility must be there, Mr. Speaker; full-cost pricing for the supply of water, commitment to knowledge-based approach, and partnership amongst all levels of government and citizens in developing and implementing water management solutions. We can no longer take our water supply and quality for granted. We all have to work together to ensure that our supply and quality is of high quality and top-notch all of the time.

So what we've said in our response, Mr. Speaker, really there's four goals and objectives. And the first goal is that the waterworks system provides safe, clean, and sustainable drinking water. That means waterworks staff are capable and well trained, that infrastructure produces water that meets the national drinking water quality guidelines, and waterworks systems and operations are financially sustainable, Mr. Speaker.

And point number two, goals and objectives, the drinking water regulatory system is clear and effective. Regulations must be clear and ensure that health and drinking water quality will be protected in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and professional regulatory staff have access to the tools necessary to ensure compliance.

And the third goal and objective in the strategy in our plan, Mr. Speaker, is that source waters are protected now and into the future. Risks to source water quality are known, they must be known, and watersheds are protected, natural purification and protection processes are maximized, and potential for contamination is minimized.

And the fourth goal and objective, Mr. Speaker, is that citizens and consumers trust and value their drinking water and the operations that produce it. And this means: citizens have meaningful access to information about the quality of their

water on an ongoing basis; that reduced consumption of water is entertained; that consumers value quality water and are willing to pay for it; and citizens and consumers trust the quality and reliability of their drinking water systems and are confident in the regulatory system.

And to that end we have created a Saskatchewan Watershed Authority to ensure that our source waters are of the optimum performance, Mr. Speaker. And we have talked about regulatory improvements. The recommendations of Justice Laing are being adopted with regard to regulatory improvements and we have talked about water system delivery and improvements that need to be made there.

So our response, our plan is a very good one, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that problems have occurred; that indeed the tragedy of North Battleford should never happen again; and that we are working with partners, communities, and citizens to ensure that we have this.

Now let me just speak a little bit about the Municipal Financing Corporation. Mr. Speaker, there was some talk that perhaps, you know, this was something that was something new or it's been around . . . it hasn't been around for very long and that somehow there were some strange accounting principles associated with it.

Well I mentioned, you know . . . For example, the Finance critic when he talked about the Education Infrastructure Financing Corporation, well this particular new corporation is modelled on the Municipal Financing Corporation. And what it does, Mr. Speaker, is it provides dollars to communities, 100 per cent for water infrastructure using the borrowing power of government to provide those dollars.

Now when you ask, well how long has this been in existence and how long have these accounting principles been in existence? Well it's decades, Mr. Speaker.

There's no shifting of accounting principles or policies with regards to the Municipal Financing Corporation and there's no shifting with regard to the Education Infrastructure Financing Corporation. Those accounting principles have been in existence in this particular province for decades and across multiple stripes of government, Mr. Speaker. So there's no, no skulduggery or funny bookkeeping going on here.

But what this says is that we have, and as the member from Melville has indicated, we have the potential now for anyone who asks, who want to improve their infrastructure structure, the dollars are there. They just have to ask for them, Mr. Speaker, and this government will provide them.

And yes, we will work in partnership with the federal government and municipalities and working on infrastructure programs that can be capitalized. There's no problem there either, Mr. Speaker.

And when we talk about what we're doing in this province and our response to make sure that we have quality water throughout the province of Saskatchewan, I have to remind the members opposite about what their approach has been. Because when they put their eggs in their platform basket and they got

all of their heads together — and I'm sure they had glasses of water sitting in front of them, Mr. Speaker — they did not mention water quality. They do not mention water quality in their platform.

And when we asked them about what they would do with regard to municipalities, guess what they said in their platform in 1999, Mr. Speaker? Guess what they said? And I quote from page 17, bullet no. 4 on the bottom of, new partnership with municipal government, *The Way Up*, it says:

Amending legislation and regulations to give municipalities the freedom to deliver local services with a minimum of provincial government interference.

That's what they said. And then they have the nerve today to get up and say we need to be . . . have more regulation in the provincial government, Mr. Speaker. They criticize the provincial government when they would have turned all of the regulations over to municipalities.

Well this provincial government will not ignore its responsibility for water in this province, Mr. Speaker, and we are making sure that the regulatory regime is in full place so that the people of Saskatchewan can be protected.

Now when we have, you know, action plans and our plan is intensive, and we look at their plan to grow Saskatchewan and their points — what did they say about water and water quality? Nothing. Nothing, Mr. Speaker. They have not said one thing because water is not important to the members opposite because it's an issue of no concern to them.

So I just cannot believe that they come up here and ask for an emergency debate on an issue that we've had out there for some time; that this government has been responding to for some time; and now we have an action plan — all 28 recommendations adopted — and the plan that will provide for good quality water in the province of Saskatchewan for years and decades to come, Mr. Speaker.

And what we plan on doing as a government is ensuring that all of the levels of government — whether it's municipalities, provincial, or federal — and the citizens of Saskatchewan can participate in making sure that quality water is of prime concern to the people of this province and to this government.

So, Mr. Speaker, with these remarks I would just like to say that I will be supporting the amendment. I support the approach of government. I will not be supporting the amendment of the members opposite.

And I just wanted to highlight again, Mr. Speaker, that they have no plan, and that their motion makes no sense, and their track record on water is zero, Mr. Speaker.

I will be supporting our amendment. Thank you, very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:15)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure

to be able to enter into this afternoon's debate, this very important debate, dealing with water — both the quantity and quality of supply and safe drinking water to all our communities in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we all know of the importance of water and the vital role it plays in everyone's life, Mr. Speaker. That certainly has been brought out by recent events in North Battleford where they had a quality problem — it wasn't so much a quantity problem, but it certainly was a quality problem.

There are numerous communities in this province, Mr. Speaker, who have problems both with quantity and quality, and who are at the same time facing a revenue shortfall, a cost-price squeeze if you will, in their communities. Many small communities in my constituency are losing . . . have lost their grain elevators, a major tax base in their communities, and at the same time their water and sewer infrastructure is aged, it's near the end of its useful lifetime, and they are looking at replacing it. And so they have that problem, and now there are one or two communities in the constituency who are at this moment experiencing some very serious water supply problems. And I will mention the village of Elfros in a moment or two.

But what I'd like to say at this time, Mr. Speaker, is that we on this side of the House put forth a motion today which calls on this government to take its responsibility in not only managing and regulating, but also it has a responsibility to help with some of the costs that these communities are facing at this present time.

Now I know . . . And some of the members opposite, they like to talk about the fact — and we've seen that most of them live in the major cities — that there aren't any taxpayer dollars going into these cities' water sewer and supply. Well I'm not too sure if that actually is a fact. I think back to the Buffalo Plains water pipeline, it seems to me that there was some massive federal and provincial dollars that went into that.

And I guess what some of the small communities are saying is, look, we don't expect the taxpayers of this province to do everything for us, but when we're in crisis we do need a bit of a helping hand.

And what does this government come forward with in their amendment? They talk about improving the regulatory system. There's no mention of financial assistance. In fact there isn't even any mention of technical assistance. Currently, I understand, through Sask Water there is some minimal technical assistance to some of the communities and it's certainly useful, and the communities are making use of these technical assistance, Mr. Speaker.

In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed in the media that there is a problem in the village of Elfros with their water supply. Last year, last August I believe it was, the village of Elfros spent \$30,000 in drilling a new well to ensure a supply of water. They thought that they had at that time tapped into a very reliable, good quality water supply for their village. As I said, it cost them \$30,000. I should mention that the village of Elfros has about 160 people living in that community and they did this on their own.

They had applied earlier, probably in the fall of 2000, for an infrastructure grant. They received a letter dated April 9, 2001 saying that they were . . . from the infrastructure program administrator saying that the village of Elfros was not successful in getting any financial help from that program. So the residents of the community went ahead, got a well driller, drilled this new well, and they thought they were . . . had a good and safe water supply secured.

But much to their disappointment and concern, on March 19 the well went dry and ever since that time, Mr. Speaker, they have a well driller in to drill . . . look for a new water supply but in the meantime they're hauling water. And hauling water is not a cheap undertaking. In fact it's very costly.

I've heard members of opposite, ministers of this government say, well some of these small communities may have to look at hauling water in the future because we just can't fix all the water supplies that are out there; we can't fix the infrastructure and the distribution system so we'll go back to the old system of the waterman with two 5-gallon pails delivering 10 gallons or 15 gallons or 20 gallons of water to each household. Well I don't think that's a . . . I don't think anybody believes that that's realistic and I don't think these people, when they made these suggestions, actually looked into what hauling water to a community would cost.

Well I can give them some factual information, Mr. Speaker, as to what hauling water to a small community costs. The village of Elfros, as I said, has been hauling water to their residents, to their town reservoir since March 19 and it's a 40-mile round trip to haul the water, Mr. Speaker. And they're hauling about 12,000 gallons a day and it's costing them \$1,000 per day to haul this water. And that has . . . that's just to haul the water, Mr. Speaker. I believe there's no cost in getting the water. If it is, it's very minimal but the large costs are in hauling water.

And this is something that they . . . the small village is going to have to pay for. They've been asking this government for some financial assistance, and the only thing that they get from this government, to this point in time, is go and see the Municipal Financing Corporation and borrow the money. There hasn't been one dollar to this time, Mr. Speaker, in helping these people.

Since March 19, as I mentioned, they've engaged a well-drilling contractor to seek a supply of water. I talked to them this afternoon. They are currently pump testing a well and they're hopeful that this will be the supply. But this is the sixth hole that they've drilled, Mr. Speaker.

As far as costs of this water crisis since March 19, Mr. Speaker, they've received invoices from the person hauling the water for them and also from the well driller to this point totalling about \$30,000, Mr. Speaker. But they feel that there's probably another 15 to \$20,000 to come in outstanding bills.

So for this small village of 160 people, since last August they will have incurred about \$80,000 in expenditures just for a well, just for a safe supply of water, Mr. Speaker. That works out to about \$500 for every man, woman, and child living in that community.

And that has nothing to do with the distribution, the filtration, their water plant. This is just to gain a reliable supply of water. And as I said, Mr. Speaker, they don't know whether they have that. They're hopeful. It looks encouraging. They tell me that they've been pumping it since last night, the well, and they're going to pump it for a couple of days.

They have been . . . Sask Water has been in touch with them, and the people that are looking after the water situation in Elfros have been talking to some of the Sask Water engineers. They've been getting some advice. The comment that I had is they're not sure how helpful it is. But most of the decisions that have been made in that community have been made by the local individuals. And as I said, they feel they may have a good supply of water.

But that doesn't say anything to address their aging infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. And that's another cost that they're very concerned about and that's something that they will have to deal with at another day.

I should mention that they did get a little bit of help with these high costs on their very first well that they drilled last summer, Mr. Speaker, and that was \$1,400 from . . . through a PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) grant from the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other communities in my constituency that are very concerned about their water supply. In order to have a viable community that will attract industry and economic activity in their communities, water is of course one of the very . . . the essentials that are needed.

The town of Wynyard has, as I have mentioned on numerous occasions, has a . . . the only poultry processing plant in this province. And that processing plant, I had the opportunity to tour it a couple of months ago. That poultry processing plant uses a lot of water to . . . in its operation.

And the town of Wynyard is having some real major problems in supplying enough good quality water for that plant. They are constantly developing new wells and looking for other supplies and so on, and that's . . . I've been in discussion with them for quite some time as to how we can attack this problem.

They haven't found any solutions. They've been talking to agencies of government and to this point in time there hasn't been a real solution put forward, Mr. Speaker.

The First Nations community of Day Star, which is in my constituency, has had a long, ongoing problem with good . . . a good supply of drinking water. In fact, I believe they were on a boil-water list for quite some time. I'm not sure. I was told by the chief that there is some movement in that area, that they feel that they will be able to perhaps rectify that situation before too long. But this is all through their . . . I asked them if there was any help from this NDP government and he said no, they have been able to do this on their own through the resources that they have at their disposal, Mr. Speaker.

So when we get . . . when we look at the amendment to the motion that this . . . the members opposite moved by the member from Melville, it's devoid of any reference at all to any

financial help. And it's of course . . . it's not surprising at all because this government is broke. They don't have any money, Mr. Speaker.

They've got a 45-cent surplus, if you want to put their budget in terms of a family budget. If you take the budget, it's a budget of \$6.3 billion of expenses and a \$45,000 surplus. If you want to reduce that down by simply knocking off some zeros and putting it in terms that the average citizen can understand — it's a \$63,000 household budget, you do all your budgeting and at the end of the year they're telling us they're going to have a 45 cent surplus.

Well, I mean, anybody that looks at it for more than two seconds will realize how ridiculous that is so it's no wonder that there's no reference to any type of financial help. And why do we find ourselves in this situation, Mr. Speaker?

Well you don't have to be a rocket scientist, you just have to sort of stand back and look at what's been happening in this province for quite sometime. This NDP government, they have no plan or no vision as to how to grow the province, how to create more employment, to have more people living in this province, to have more taxpayers, to have a bigger base of revenue for the government.

We have real needs all across this province, Mr. Speaker. There's needs for water, there's needs for highways, there's needs for health. And we can't continue to meet those needs with a declining population, a declining number of people working, and no plan to rectify that situation, Mr. Speaker.

And so, therefore, as they say out in farm country, the chickens have come home to roost, Mr. Speaker. And unfortunately the communities such as North Battleford, Perdue, Elfros, and Arran are bearing the brunt of that.

But who are the other communities that'll be facing similar situations very shortly, Mr. Speaker? We don't know, but I'm sure the clock is ticking and the infrastructure is wearing out and it will be just a matter of time before unfortunately there are other communities, whether they have problems with quality or quantity or both, Mr. Speaker.

And what's the response from this government, Mr. Speaker? Well more regulation; we're going to hire a couple of extra regulators. But they don't talk about actually solving the problem and dealing with the crisis that we have out there, Mr. Speaker.

So it's no surprise, Mr. Speaker, that I will be supporting the motion and certainly not supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I want to express my thanks to the many people that worked very hard over the term of the commissioner's work. There's many compelling tales and many stories and instances of support, and certainly a challenge for the people of North Battleford and the province as a whole.

There's no question that the government was profoundly

saddened, deeply saddened by this tragic event, and that we want to advise the people of North Battleford and the people of Saskatchewan as a whole, that there are many lessons we have learned and that we need to build from here on in, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that the sentiment in North Battleford is one of there is lessons learned and now it's time for us to move on.

(16:30)

I want to commend the city as a whole for doing a tremendous job of going through what no city, no town or village, wishes to go through — and that of course is a challenge with their water system that resulted in several thousand people becoming ill.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government, as we've mentioned time and time again, we are profoundly saddened by the events of North Battleford. But, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan we're known to turn adversity into opportunity. And that the commissioner pointed out some recommendations which the government has accepted, and the government has been working on for the past several years to meet those recommendations, to meet other recommendations, and go on from here.

I believe the people of North Battleford wanted to have the inquiry to find out what went wrong, Mr. Speaker. And the Premier called the inquiry very quickly, and I think so very important that leadership at this stage of the game is so very important in the overall strategy of helping communities find solutions to some of their safe water challenges.

Mr. Speaker, the people wanted answers. What went wrong and what can we do differently. Justice Laing provided those answers in the form of recommendations which this government and this province has accepted.

People wanted to make sure we had inspections, Mr. Speaker. And yes, some people wanted tougher rules, regulations that would force communities to do certain things in a brand new fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that people wanted fair water prices. Not high, not low, but fair prices to reflect what it costs to bring them safe water to their home, to reflect what it cost to treat sewers so we're not dumping raw sewer into rivers which we ultimately draw our water from.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the people of North Battleford, through their example and through their sacrifice, want to also tell people that if you stick together and build from here that we can learn many lessons; but now it is time to move onto the next chapter, the city of North Battleford and the water challenges that they faced, and ultimately all citizens and communities face in the province of Saskatchewan.

So yes, Mr. Speaker, many valuable lessons learned; many valuable lessons that'll be applied; and now it is time to building together, over a period of time, a new system to make sure our water quality is there forever.

Mr. Speaker, for information: 60 per cent of our communities across Saskatchewan have access to good, clean, safe drinking

water, and we think it's only fair that those citizens that are getting that good, clean, safe water should pay for the delivery of that good, clean water. Some communities pay, Mr. Speaker, \$50 per year — not per month but per year — while other residents in Saskatchewan pay 80 to \$90 a month. So we believe now it's beginning to look at the whole aspect of a user-pay basis when it comes to that water need.

This government's role has never been, nor is it now, to fund systems. We'll help those systems through provincial government money and money from Ottawa through CSIP, the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program. Our role, through this Assembly, is to legislatively make sure that the water is safe. We are the regulator.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to also point out that, in this Assembly, we believe in partnerships. And meeting the water quality issues across this country requires partnerships, and we want to lead by example here in the great province of Saskatchewan.

Now, obviously everybody in the province knows that the opposition will get up on this day and rant and rave and point fingers and assess blame. They want to assess blame, Mr. Speaker and, as a government, we want to show leadership and not point the finger and say it was that person's fault or this system's fault or the federal government's fault.

Mr. Speaker, we have always maintained on this side of the Assembly we are part of the solution and it's not proper for us to point a finger and say they created the problem. We are saying you are also part of the solution.

Mr. Speaker, it takes great courage for our Premier to get up and quickly announce the inquiry. The Premier believed that the people of North Battleford wanted an inquiry, and he put that inquiry together right now. And he said I want to know what happened here and how we can stop this from ever happening again to any Saskatchewan community or family.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 60 to 70 per cent — and those figures, of course, get better each day — of the people that we serve through our municipal systems for water service are being served with safe water. We're fairly comfortable with that statement. It is the last 30 per cent that we have to concentrate on, Mr. Speaker — the last 30 per cent.

Of the remaining 30 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 15 per cent of them are farm families or farmers that have their own well system and that well system will be regulated or monitored through the Health department. The last 15 per cent, Mr. Speaker, is where we have to begin the work.

And often you hear opposition talking about a number of small communities and I say, as the minister responsible for Sask Water, is we will stand by those communities, large and small, and begin to help them address their safe water needs. And I'll point out, as my hon. friend has said, that many of the communities last year that were on boil-water advisories have been serviced or in the process of being serviced with some new systems to help them meet some of the guidelines that we have imposed.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is much more progress that needs to be made and as a government we've made that well known, that we will stand behind the First Nations government and alongside of municipal governments, with the federal government, and we will say together, we can impose a schedule, we can impose some new rules, regulations. We will help with funding, but to those communities that specifically need funding.

We also want to make sure that public awareness is there, the education of the public, and make sure that they can appreciate that sometimes we may have to pay more for our water bill than we pay for our cable bill, Mr. Speaker.

The priorities that we all have as Saskatchewan people and as a government is to show leadership on this whole matter and turn adversity — as the fine citizens of North Battleford have done — to turn adversity into opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, we've learned lessons. We've seen the leadership of the city as a whole to teach us, yes you can go through some very trying times, but let us rebuild that hope, that opportunity, the economy, and the safety of our public in a brand new day, in a brand new system.

Mr. Speaker, we have not been sitting on our hands worrying about what we should do with the system. In fact, last year we spent \$1.4 million in new funding to hire 11 inspectors in SERM. As well, we employed 4.5 new positions at the provincial lab to make sure that testing was done as quickly as possible on water and the turnaround of those test results were well known. We also, Mr. Speaker, had mandatory certification of water treatment plant operators by 2005.

Mr. Speaker, we also put in through our partners, municipal, federal, and provincial governments put in \$30 million to the CSIP program, of course which is meant to help many communities meet some of the water treatment plant costs, as we go down this path.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge I think the opposition faces is not that they voted against the budget. That's a known fact; they voted against last year's budget. But the challenge that they particularly face, Mr. Speaker, is that they had challenged the workers that we put out there.

They went after many of these civil servants, Mr. Speaker, with no regard. And let the record show, last year when we hired some new water inspectors, there was a lot of opposition for those inspectors from across the way.

So it's one thing to vote against the budget, Mr. Speaker, but it's another thing to attack a civil servant that we have employed to make sure they're able to meet some of those challenges when it comes to safe water. And that is what hurts them the most, Mr. Speaker. The record shows they attacked those civil servants, those front-line civil servants, and now today they're saying, oh, we're not doing enough now.

Well let's go back, Mr. Speaker, again to a couple of days ago when we announced 18 new positions and \$2.4 million in new funding, bringing up the total of two years, \$3.8 million and 33 new positions, which include 9 new inspectors in Environment,

6 new public health inspectors, and 3 additional new positions at the provincial lab for water testing, Mr. Speaker.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, we have a new computer system for faster tracking of water problems and for better communication between all the parties. The computer system, Mr. Speaker, has Internet capability, where many residents, or any residents can look up their municipality's compliance, with sample submission requirements and what the quality of their water is.

We have some tough new regulations, Mr. Speaker. It requires system operators to report when pieces of equipment break down, and certainly when chlorine levels are low. We're putting guidelines into legally enforceable standards, Mr. Speaker — penalties for breaking the minister's orders.

Mr. Speaker, the municipalities have to report annually to their residents on their financial plans for their water systems, their compliance with submitting water samples, and the quality of water that they produce, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a new drinking water quality unit in Environment will oversee the whole process.

Mr. Speaker, there'll also be an annual report here at the Assembly on drinking water throughout Saskatchewan.

We will continue educating operators, and, Mr. Speaker, to complement some of the work that has been done, we are also going to institute a new watershed authority to protect water at source in some of the watersheds.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a three-pronged approach. First of all we put in some tough regulations and rules to make sure that some of the communities know they have to follow through.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we also provide some funding through CSIP and the municipal financing board to support some of the communities out there that have a difficult time in meeting some of the needs.

Mr. Speaker, we have promoted user fee, public information, public education to get to the solution, Mr. Speaker. And now, Mr. Speaker, we have a watershed authority Act which is going to help protect water at source so throughout Saskatchewan we can have some real plans, a coordinated plan to make sure that water — no matter where it is — is protected at source; which of course lessens the demand for treatment at the water treatment plant, thus lessening the pressures on some of the communities in providing that safe water, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we also expect an announcement later on this month, an announcement from the minister of government affairs and the federal government, to talk to us and tell us what exactly they're putting forward as a partner between the municipalities, between the communities, between the federal-provincial governments as to what we're going to do to meet some of the demands of the last 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the smaller communities that we want to help solve in terms of meeting some of their water quality standards.

Mr. Speaker, no question this is a difficult file for any government to go through. Walkerton was a wake-up call;

North Battleford was one as well. And, Mr. Speaker, this government has not stopped moving since those wake-up calls. And, Mr. Speaker, we will continue building on that relationship with our partners to come up with a solution. And if that takes us two years to five years to seven years, this part of the Assembly, this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, will not blink. We will stand with our municipal partners and our federal partners to come up with solutions, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also point out there's a lot of good things that many people have done, but a lot of these processes and this progress we talk about is going to take time. There is no overnight solution. The most amazing thing, Mr. Speaker, despite what the progress was made last year with \$30 million, and the progress made this year, once again the opposition gets up and says, well we vote against that.

Why would they vote against having more inspectors out there? Do they not believe in the recommendations made by Justice Laing, where Justice Laing talked about that? Are they attacking Justice Laing's points when he talks about putting together a better system?

Well we need to ask those questions. The recommendations are very clear. Does the opposition support the recommendations or do they not? On this side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we believe the recommendations are very sound. We have been acting on them for the past year and will continue acting on them this year. And I think, Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words, as I rattled off a number of things that we have done to make sure that we have a good sound water strategy in this province.

(16:45)

Mr. Speaker, we want to protect our water from source right to the tap. And I think it's very important that we look at all the players and their roles and responsibility everybody plays, Mr. Speaker. Not only do we have to make sure we protect the water at source, but we've got to have trained, certified operators operating these water treatment plants.

And many communities and citizens of these communities, they are beginning to realize when you pay \$50 a year for water, then fundamentally you have to be very careful because that's a very low price. And all of a sudden we begin to assess, well perhaps \$50 a year is not enough money to operate our water treatment plant to the level it should be operated. And this is what I talk about, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about public education.

The municipalities out there have to know that they have a support system in place now to help them with inspections. But they also have to know and they have to tell their consumers or their customers, look, listen, we had to put a financial plan together to make sure that this plant not only operates with all the rules and regulations and a certified staff, but they also have some money set aside for future growth or to replace older equipment. And if we don't do some of these things then we could be subjected to fines; we could be subjected to being closed down; or we could be subjected to the government operating our system.

Now I know many communities, Mr. Speaker, they want to protect their local systems. They have great pride that they own their systems and they do generate fairly decent revenues. All we are saying is, as a result of the lessons, that we have to now make sure that we're more stringent in the rules and regulations, that you're more professional in some of the approaches — and the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, as time goes on we are going to talk more and more about water over the next several months. I look forward to that opportunity and I say today that it's not about politics that we have to do this work. It is about progress, it's about leadership, it's about commitment, and it's about partnership. So therefore I'll not be supporting their motion. I'll be standing in support of the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand in this Assembly today to make a few comments in regards to the motion before us and the debate around the quality of water in the province of Saskatchewan. And there's no doubt, Mr. Speaker, having observed the papers and certainly following the release of Justice Laing's report in regards to the problems that the residents of North Battleford faced, to find that there was certainly anger on the part of many people, as *The Leader-Post*, Saturday, April 6 . . . one comment is:

. . . anger has only intensified among many people in North Battleford towards those who let their water treatment system fall into disrepair.

(And) "There are lots of reasons why we feel like victims," . . .

And it even goes on to talk about the fact of trust and gaining that . . . regaining that trust. I think a comment in this article talks about the fact that:

"North Battleford should have the safest water in Canada. (And I think referring to the . . . what they've had to face over the past year or two years.) Yet, I can't bring myself to have a glass of water. Logic tells me I should. But I can't trust it."

You know, Mr. Speaker, we think about water. I think we take water and quality water, good quality water, for granted in . . . not only in our province but even in our country.

We think about the water supplies we have, or we have had access to, and it's hard to believe and even fathom that we would run into situations such as we've had in Walkerton and now most recently in North Battleford, that the residents of these communities and many communities across this province and across this country would be facing situations where their water quality would really be at question to the point as we've seen in the North Battleford situation — some 7,000 people who have been affected and sick as a result of the quality of water.

And, Mr. Speaker, it would be easy to point the finger. And I think we could . . . I believe the member from Melville talked

about the fact that we blame the city council in North Battleford when many of the councils across this province are basically offering a volunteer service. And I don't think any member in this Assembly actually today wants to point their finger at a specific council or some of the decisions that they've made.

But I believe, Mr. Speaker, we certainly need to take a look at government; we need to take a look at the way government implements policy; and the leadership role government takes. And I believe, I believe, Mr. Speaker, Justice Laing points that out. And there's a comment. One of his findings talks about the lack of inspection by SERM of the North Battleford surface water treatment plant for 10 years prior to 2001 had a direct bearing on the events of April 2001.

Mr. Speaker, the current minister responsible for Sask Water just made a comment about the fact that there really won't be a lot of provincial assistance for communities in dealing with their water problems. And when I . . . as the member from Melville mentioned communities like Wawota that have upgraded their water plants.

And I want to talk about that for a minute, Mr. Speaker. Because first of all when you look at a community like Wawota, for example, that community — when they took a look at what they were facing in regards to quality water in their community — they looked at their aging facility and they realized that they had a problem on their hands and they'd better start dealing with it.

And at the time when they started looking into what would be needed to upgrade that plant, they went to . . . they approached the provincial government, they approached the federal government for some assistance because of the immense cost of upgrading that plant. And at the time there wasn't any assistance available of any kind, at any level of government. And the community finally, and the community leadership basically said, came to the conclusion that the health of their residents was more important than waiting for governments — the senior governments — to come up with an infrastructure program that would assist them in meeting the needs of their communities.

Now you can say, well maybe for Wawota that was fine because they had the resources within their community to bring together the much needed financial resources in order to upgrade their plant.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are communities throughout this province that are looking at a significant financial cost to upgrade their water treatment plants. And I know the community of Kipling has currently . . . has put forward a proposal and I believe they've received some assistance through the infrastructure program. And so some communities receive and some communities don't receive; is that fair?

Mr. Speaker, is it fair for the government to point the finger at local authorities and say, you're responsible, and if you've got a problem it's your responsibility to fund that problem, when, Mr. Speaker, over the past 10 years we've seen a significant off-load onto rural governments by this government in regards to a lot of the services.

Meaning that a lot of these communities have already gone to their local citizens through the tax base for the funding, significant funding, just to maintain the services that they need to provide to their communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be, it would be appropriate for a government and governments to realize that they have a responsibility. The minister of Sask Water talked about the responsibility to lay out some guidelines and regulations that could be followed. But at the same time, while you're setting out the regulations — and making sure that they are regulations if significant changes are needed — that we don't off-load more onto rural communities so that when they have to address the need of upgrading their water facility that they've tapped their taxpayers to the limit and they have nowhere else to look in order to fund their water management programs.

Yes and I did . . . the member from Melville's pointing out that Kipling did get their approval. And that came about, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the realization of that council that they needed to take a significant look at water quality and the health of their residents as well.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to comment on the fact that communities like Kipling have been very diligent in their . . . making sure or seeing to it that their maintenance personnel have been going to ongoing training sessions so that they can manage the facilities, so that they make sure that all the checks and balances are in place to guarantee that the water quality . . . the water leaving their plant is of a quality that would meet the needs, to the . . . health needs of their community.

Mr. Speaker, so I think what I want people to realize is that local governments in many cases are going beyond what is needed to guarantee that there is quality water and that they are seeing to it that there is the quality, the infrastructures in place, that the guidelines are in place to guarantee that the treatment plants are upgraded and maintained and managed properly.

The unfortunate part is, senior governments over the past few years have off-loaded on those local governments, and then when a problem arises senior governments are not prepared to accept their responsibility for the problems that have arisen.

In fact, as we've seen from this government over the past 10 years, they found it a lot easier to point the finger at somebody else rather than accepting responsibility for their actions or lack thereof.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that as I look at this issue — and it's an issue that really demands a lot more time, and a lot more . . . there could be a lot more said about the lack of leadership coming from the government benches and from the government of the day.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to take a careful look at the recommendations and I believe we need to look at ways in which we can build for our future to guarantee a quality water supply.

And, Mr. Speaker, therefore I cannot support the amendment, but I certainly support the motion before the Assembly this afternoon.

The division bells rang from 16:57 until 17:02.

Amendment agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 29

Calvert	Addley	Atkinson
Hagel	Lautermilch	Serby
Melenchuk	Cline	Sonntag
Osika	Lorjé	Kasperski
Goulet	Van Mulligen	Prebble
Belanger	Crofford	Axworthy
Nilson	Junor	Hamilton
Harper	Jones	Higgins
Trew	Wartman	Thomson
Yates	McCall	

Nays — 19

Kwiatkowski	Heppner	Krawetz
Gantfoer	Toth	Wakefield
Stewart	Elhard	McMorris
D'Autremont	Bakken	Wall
Brkich	Wiberg	Weekes
Harpauer	Hart	Huyghebaert
Hillson		

The Speaker: — The motion before the Assembly then is the main motion moved by the member for Carrot River Valley and seconded by the member for North Battleford as amended.

Motion as amended agreed to on division.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move we convert for debates returnable.

The Speaker: — No. 69 converted to orders for return debatable.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The Chair: — It now being past 5 o'clock, this committee will stand recessed until 7 p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.