

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Saskatchewan concerned about the premium hikes and coverage reductions with crop insurance. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Bjorkdale and Mistatim, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Gantfoer: — . . . today on behalf of citizens concerned about the proposed long-term care fees. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, today on this petition I have signatures from the communities of Melfort, Star City, Beatty, Yellow Creek. In addition to that, signatures that have come in from the Internet that I've included with this petition, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition. 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.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Esterhazy, Langenburg, Spy Hill, Togo, and Yorkton.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of citizens of the province regarding the condition of our highways. This particular

highway would happen to be 35 Highway. 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 to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Balcarres, Regina, Osage, Francis, Tyvan, and White Bear.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of residents of the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about the increase to long-term care fees. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Weyburn, Benson, and Bienfait.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of people in the southwest corner of our province, Mr. Speaker, concerned about changes to the prescription drug plan. 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 reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are from the city of Swift Current and the southwest communities of Vanguard, Kincaid, and Hazenmore.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon to present to the Assembly in regards to crop insurance premium hikes and coverage reductions. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the 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, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people from Meath Park and Prince Albert.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens concerned about crop insurance premium hikes and 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 plan 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 Shellbrook and Biggar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition concerning 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 Saskatchewan residents.

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

And the petitioners who signed this are from a variety of places which shows how well this highway is travelled. They're from Watrous, Saskatoon, Pike Lake, Balgonie, Imperial, Simpson, Stalwart, and Orangeville, Ontario.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present today on behalf of citizens. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the 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.

The signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Bulyea and Southey.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding the tobacco legislation. And 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 will 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.

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

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, on this petition are from Saskatoon, Spiritwood, Rabbit Lake, Leoville.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and hereby received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers no. 7, 8, 11, 17, 18, 23, 24, and 31.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the minister in charge of Corporations branch: in view of the lesser staff time involved, is the government considering following the lead of the federal government in offering a reduced filing fee for corporations that file by e-mail and e-filing?

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Environment: is your department responsible in whole or in part for management of forest fringe lands, commercial activity on said lands or taxation of any form of commercial activity on said lands; if so, in what capacity?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister Responsible for Government Relations, also one for the Minister of Agriculture, and one for Minister of Industry and Resources.

Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 28 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Investments Corporation: is SaskPower currently involved in any lawsuits brought by any insurance business or insurance co-operative?

And I give notice that I shall on day no. 28 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Investments Corporation: has SaskPower ever violated its own policies and procedures dealing with the revenue metering

requirements?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Environment: in 2001, with regard to each wildlife management zone in Saskatchewan: (1) what was the number of big game permits issued by species to outfitters in each zone; (2) what was the number of those permits that were allocated to hunters by outfitters in each zone; (3) by species, how many outfitters in each zone did not utilize their full allocation of big-game permits; (4) by species, how many outfitters failed to allocate any of their big-game permits to hunters?

I so submit, Mr. Speaker.

As well as questions for 1999 and 2000.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Members, I would first of all like to, on behalf of the legislature, extend a special welcome to nine people who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These are the voting members of the Canadian Ombudsman Association and they've come here from across Canada to attend meetings. And they are hosted by our own Provincial Ombudsman, Barbara Tomkins.

And I would ask them to rise individually when I mention their names, starting with Barbara Tomkins, from Saskatchewan; Scott Sutton, from Alberta; Howard Kushner, from British Columbia; Pauline Champoux-Lesage, from Quebec; Fraser March, from Newfoundland; Hank Moorlag, from Yukon; Eva Aariak, from Nunavut; Barry Tuckett, from Manitoba; Patrick Robardet, from Laval University; and I think that's all of them.

And I extend, on behalf of all of the legislature, a warm welcome to all of our representatives of the Canadian Ombudsman Association.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly, a number of students seated in the east gallery.

We have with us today from Bruno School, 27 grade 8 students, and as well from Cudworth School we have 12 grade 8 students.

And these students are accompanied by their teacher, from Bruno, Mr. Jeff Marshak, and from Cudworth, Mr. Glen Ukrainetz and Ms. Nancy Kirtzinger. We also have, accompanying these students, some chaperones, parents from Bruno, Wendy Hoppe and Connie Basset.

And these students are in Regina today to take in a number of different activities. And I do hope that you enjoy your time here in the legislature, and I ask all members of the Assembly to behave yourselves very well today to set a good example to these students sitting in the gallery.

And I do look forward to meeting with you after question period. So welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the east gallery is Mr. Grant Karwacki. He and his brother David are in Regina this afternoon to view proceedings and after proceedings they will be meeting with all of the members of the Liberal caucus.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature, seated in the west gallery, one of my constituents, Eric August. Eric's a U of R (University of Regina) student and a person who's very interested in politics and in how society works. And we welcome him here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to beg your indulgence and my colleagues here in the House to allow me to recognize, with a group of members from the Ombudsman's office, a long-time friend, a colleague, a former colleague, Mr. Hank Moorlag, with whom I served in Manitoba. I'd like you to once again welcome him here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Bruno T-Birds Senior Hockey League Champions

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bruno T-Birds are now the Wheatland Senior Hockey League Champions. The team defeated Perdue in the semifinal round in three games straight, advancing to the final round against the Anaheim Knights.

The Bruno T-Birds won the first game against the Anaheim Knights seven to nothing. Because of time constraints the series was changed to the best of three instead of the best of five.

At the final game in Anaheim there was a 1/1 tie until the start of the third period. The T-Birds came out strong, scoring three quick goals in less than a minute of each other. The goals were scored by Cory Pavelich, Russel Julé, and Jeff Bassett. Anaheim came back and scored several goals with the final score of 5 to 4 for Bruno.

(13:45)

Bruno's captain, which happens to be my son, Mr. Speaker, Russel Julé, accepted the trophy on behalf of the team. Justin Dauvin and Brian Prefontaine were both named the most valuable players of the playoffs.

The Bruno T-Birds had a great season, winning first place in regular season play with a record of 37 wins and 7 losses.

Team awards for regular season play went to Jeff Bassett for rookie of the year, Dustin Miller and Rob Usher for top team

goaltenders, and Rob Usher for top goaltender.

Congratulations to the Bruno T-Birds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Petitions to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, just when we thought the midnight show of the Sask Party circus could not get any more bizarre, they find a way to top themselves, or in this case, Mr. Speaker, to bottom themselves. Just when we think their repertoire of grubby tricks is exhausted, they come up with a new one.

The one constant is that each of these acts follows the pattern begun with that party's birth in the dark of night. In this month alone we have witnessed a secret nomination, the instant poll, and the special edition e-mail.

I would think that's enough for any gang, Mr. Speaker. But once you get a taste of chicanery, I suppose it's hard to stop, like that old country song about the egg-sucking dog.

Now we have petitions by members of the Legislative Assembly addressed to members of the Legislative Assembly to act on behalf of the public who are not asked to sign the petitions presented on their behalf, Mr. Speaker.

Did I mention the word bizarre? How about contemptible? Disrespectful goes without saying.

Mr. Speaker, we are very mindful of and even reverential to the traditions which guide us — the dress code, our formal deference to the mace, our adherence to the rules. All are part of our democracy, not to be manipulated, mocked, or belittled.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Achievements

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to inform the members of the Assembly of some recent happenings back in Swift Current.

Mr. Speaker, on April 8, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend the annual meeting of the Dr. Noble Irwin Healthcare Foundation. In just three years the foundation has raised over \$4 million, Mr. Speaker, through various donations and fundraising activities. The money is used to purchase medical equipment. And the organization is also heavily involved in lobbying for a new regional hospital for Swift Current and area.

Congratulations to the many volunteers of the Dr. Noble Irwin Healthcare Foundation who have put . . .

The Speaker: — I'm sorry. Order, please. I would ask for order so that the member . . . be able to make himself heard to all who are here in the Assembly today.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the

many volunteers of the Dr. Noble Irwin Health Care Foundation who have put in countless hours of volunteer work for such a worthwhile cause.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to highlight the accomplishments of a local theatre group back in my hometown. The Swift Current Little Theatre produces two plays each year. Their second performance this year called *The Melville Boys* garnered the Little Theatre . . . the award for runner-up . . . the best play at a recent provincial festival. Randolph Wall directed the play and Bruce Rayner was the stage manager.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to mention, make special mention of Wendy Kane's performance. She received the trophy for best actress in a supporting role at the festival. Congratulations to all the actors and the people working behind the scenes who make the Swift Current Little Theatre a success year after year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Agricultural Genomics Awards

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatoon shines in agricultural genomics. The Saskatoon agricultural biotech research community won a huge vote of confidence by receiving awards that reconfirm Saskatoon as Canada's leading centre in agricultural genomics.

Two agricultural genomics projects worth \$17 million are led by highly respected Saskatoon scientists Dr. Lorne Babiuk and Dr. Wilf Keller.

Dr. Babiuk is the director of the Veterinary Infectious Disease Organization, VIDO, at the University of Saskatchewan and will lead a \$26.9 million genomics research project to gain new knowledge about how immunity to infectious diseases works, and to develop prevention strategies for both human and animal infections.

This announcement complements the previous \$14.2 million expansion of the VIDO facility. While Genome Canada announced it is providing half of the money for the project — \$13 million — two private sector companies, AniGenics Inc. of Chicago, and Inimex of Vancouver, along with the province of Saskatchewan, will provide the other half of the funding.

Mr. Speaker, a second agricultural genomics project, directed toward developing improved canola, will be led by Dr. Keller, the director of the National Research Council Plant Biotechnology Institute of Saskatoon. Genome Canada will contribute \$3.75 million, or one-half of the total project cost.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the powerhouse of expertise in agricultural genomics that has been built up over the last few years will contribute to this research effort, improving research and improving Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Medical Laboratory Week

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to rise and ask all members of the House to recognize National Medical Laboratory Week.

Mr. Speaker, medical laboratory technologists, or MLTs as they're often referred to, work in five main areas including chemistry, hematology, transfusion science, microbiology, and histotechnology. Now these medical terms, Mr. Speaker, may not mean much to the average person, but they're very important for the doctors. In fact, Mr. Speaker, up to 85 per cent of patient diagnosis and treatment decisions made by doctors are influenced by the information generated by the MLT.

As a former MLT myself, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that at various points in our lives we will . . . all required the trained eye and special skills of medical laboratory technologists. And in some incidences, Mr. Speaker, it might mean the difference between life and death.

Mr. Speaker, I may be a bit biased here, but I truly believe that MLTs are the unsung heroes that work behind the scenes in the medical field — in labs, hospitals, clinics, and even in training and research environments.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, during National Medical Laboratory Technologists Week, I'm troubled to see that here in Saskatchewan, as with other health care sectors, MLTs are working hard to have their voices heard. The issues that they want addressed are important and they deserve the attention and the respect from all of us.

On behalf of the members of the House, a heartfelt thank you to all of Saskatchewan MLTs not only during National Medical Laboratory Technologists Week but for every day of the year. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Riffel Student Places in Top 3 Per Cent of Math Test

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in February each year, 70,000 of Canada's top high school and math students write the University of Waterloo's math contest.

This year a constituent of mine, Justin Hoffman, placed in the top 3 per cent of all students in Canada. Justin is a grade 10 student at Riffel High School and his outstanding placement earned him an invitation by the University of Waterloo to write their Invitational Math Challenge. Only 250 students in the country are invited to participate in this international competition that also invites students from South Africa, New Zealand, and Great Britain.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, on Wednesday, April 17, Justin will participate in this challenge. I am sure all members of this House wish Justin all the very best of luck as a representative of our community and our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Keystone Cup

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the town of Assiniboia and its hockey team, the Assiniboia Southern Rebels, hosted the Keystone Cup April 11 to 14.

Mr. Speaker, the Keystone Cup is emblematic of the Junior B hockey championship for Western Canada. There are teams from BC (British Columbia), Alberta, Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario, Team Saskatchewan from Saskatoon, and of course the host team, the Southern Rebels who are the provincial champions and won the Keystone Cup last year.

The hockey throughout the weekend was of an excellent calibre, Mr. Speaker. Round-robin play saw the team from Alberta emerge the winner by defeating Assiniboia in a hard-fought battle. The gold medal game was played between the team from Alberta — Spruce Grove — and BC, the team from Sicamous, with BC emerging as the victor in a close 2 to 1 game.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that Assiniboia won the bronze medal.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the town of Assiniboia and, in particular, Mr. Bob Himbeault and his Keystone Cup Committee for the excellent job they did in organizing this event. Another congratulations should also be extended to Mr. Dale Lessmeister, the president of the Assiniboia Southern Rebels and his coaches, staff, and players on providing us with another exciting hockey season.

Way to go, Assiniboia, on winning your medal and we'll see you next year. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Condition of Equipment at Prince Albert Hospital

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

Nurses at Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert are warning about a crisis in the obstetrics unit. They have filed more than 30 complaints saying that equipment in that unit is outdated and broken down. And more importantly, it is compromising the health and safety of mothers and their babies. Officials with the health district have refused to answer, saying this letter should never have been . . . come to the public light.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister, what does his government plan to do to address the crisis in obstetrics in Prince Albert?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The letter referred to by the member opposite is dated March 6, 2002. In that time they were operating without a nursing manager in that particular unit. Since that time they've hired a nursing management person to cover that area and they are working on a number of these issues.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that we work together with the districts to provide the funding for what they need to do. They are looking at the various equipment concerns that are there. They're also trying to deal with the human resource and management issues that are there. What we like to do is work together with the people who are running the system and we will continue to work with them and make sure that all of these kinds of problems are solved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again the minister blames someone else, in this case health care professionals, instead of taking responsibility for its lack of commitment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, it's a question of priorities. The NDP (New Democratic Party) has \$20 million for a dot-com in Atlanta, Georgia. It has \$80 million for a land titles system that doesn't work. But there is no money to ensure the safety of mothers and babies in the Prince Albert hospital.

Mr. Speaker, we're not the ones raising the concerns. They're being raised by health care providers — people who work in the obstetrics unit every day. They are saying it's a crisis; they are saying that patients' safety is at jeopardy; and they are saying it's going to get worse under this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, other than placing blame where it doesn't belong, what is this government going to do about this issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this is the government that continually looks carefully at health care and puts more money into health care each year. This year we've added \$129 million when we've had many challenges. Previous year we ended up with much more money.

The members opposite had a plan that would freeze the kinds of costs and money that they were going to put into health care and then try to sort out what was going on. That doesn't work. We have to work together with the people, work on our action plan.

In Prince Albert we have provided money for equipment through a number of different ways. They are setting priorities in that area; they are addressing issues. We will continue to work with the people in the districts because that's where the job gets done and we have to do it together with them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister points to the \$129 million increase to the allocation of health care in the province this year. But, Mr. Speaker, what he's not saying, that in that very own budget that he has, he has decreased the spending for equipment capital by \$13 million. He's cut it — cut it, Mr. Speaker, from last year when there wasn't enough money to go around. He's cut it from \$23 million down to \$10 million.

Mr. Speaker, if the P.A. (Prince Albert) Health District couldn't provide the adequate equipment budget for the obstetrics unit in last year's budget, how in the world are they going to do it in this year's budget when that minister cut the funding for equipment by \$13 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member opposite that over the last two years we were very pleased to receive money from the federal government in the amount of just over \$16 million and that that funding ended for this year. So we then ended up putting money in for equipment when it was a challenge — the \$10 million.

What we will continue to do is work with the communities to make sure that they have some special equipment money, but that they also have the ongoing kind of funding they need in their particular areas. What we do is we work together with all the people in the province to try to design a system that will provide good service for everybody.

But the only way we can do that is together. And I would ask that member to get on board and work with us as we build a good health system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, that minister is living in never-never land if he thinks we're going to get on board with a failed plan that his government has delivered.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, it's a question of priorities that this government has absolutely wrong. They have no problem standing up in this House and bragging about the fact that they've got \$20 million for a dot-com in Georgia. They have no problem about standing up in this House and saying that it's a success when they lose \$28 million on the potato business in Saskatchewan. And yet, Mr. Speaker, they complain about the fact that there's no money for critical and essential medical equipment in this province.

Mr. Speaker, where are the priorities of this government? In these ventures that they're willing to write off millions of dollars on, or in the safety of lives of mothers and babies in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I invite that member to come and work with us on our plan because there is no plan over there. There is no plan at all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — What we did, with their assistance, last year is listen carefully to the people of the province. We had hearings right in this room with the Standing Committee on Health, led by my colleague here who listened very carefully to

the people of Saskatchewan. After also receiving advice from Mr. Fyke and other specialists, we put together a plan which we presented to the people. And we're now working with the citizens of this province to build a good system.

And I invite you, and I invite all the members opposite, let's work together to build a good plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Saskatoon Crisis Shelter

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Services. Mr. Speaker, the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) Crisis Shelter in Saskatoon is facing some very difficult circumstances and they are sounding the alarm bells that without assistance they may be forced to close their doors next month.

This is a 34-bed, 24-hour unit which serves abused women and children. It provides a vital service for the safety and security of women and children who may find themselves needing help and a place to turn in order to escape a violent situation.

Mr. Speaker, the YWCA shelter says that by May they will be out of operating money and that they are attempting to renegotiate the flat fee per occupied bed that the province currently provides them. Will the minister tell us what stages these negotiations are at, and if a new agreement might be reached before the shelter is forced to close its doors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. The hon. member will be aware that currently Department of Social Services has a fee-for-service arrangement with the YWCA and is currently now in the process, Mr. Speaker, of negotiating a long-term arrangement, a framework for an arrangement for future funding.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think that there's no reason to be anything other than optimistic that the federal government will honour its commitment and provide the funds to the YWCA to continue to provide this important service.

But I ask the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about funding to services in Saskatchewan, whether she stands with her leader when he says that his vision for the future of Social Services in this province is to rip \$50 million out of the budget of Social Services. That's what he said in October of last year, Mr. Speaker. And I ask the hon. member, does she stand with his . . . with her leader?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services is a master at diverting the attention that should be focused on this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the people of this province and women and children that have been violated and are hurting

deserve more from that minister than for him to divert the attention to some other issue when in fact this is the issue of the day.

Mr. Speaker, it is very unfortunate, it's unfortunate . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, it is very, very unfortunate that emergency shelters for victims of violence are necessary in this day and age, but we all know they are. And we know how these shelters and the services they provide are often the lifeline that is needed to help women remove themselves and their children from abusive situations.

The loss of this shelter, Mr. Speaker, to Saskatoon would leave a huge void for services of this nature in the city, not only because it is the largest shelter, but also because of the quality of counselling and service it has provided for countless numbers of women and children.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP government commit to doing everything possible to help the YWCA shelter remain open and continue their work in providing counselling services to women and children in need?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, simply put, the answer is yes.

Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the hon. member's reference, clearly she didn't listen very carefully to the first answer. I said that the officials from the Department of Social Services are working together with the YW to ensure a funding framework for the future, and I remain optimistic that the federal government will provide its funding in order to continue the operation of this very good work which we value.

But I also note with interest that the hon. member says . . . refers to diverting the issue, and I wonder whether she's going to send a petition to that effect to the House, Mr. Speaker. But I would ask her once again, I would ask her once again if she will join with her leader who says that his vision about the future of Social Services in this province is to take \$50 million out of the budget of Social Services to reduce the services to those who are vulnerable in our society.

Does she stand with her leader? Yes or no, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Saskatoon Detox Facility

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting to hear the . . .

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member it seems like every day wishes to ask questions in the House. I would suggest if they called an election he will have ample opportunity after the election to ask questions.

Mr. Speaker, the YWCA Crisis Shelter in Saskatoon also houses one of the city's detox centres. If this centre closes, the service for people who need help with alcohol and drug abuse addictions will also be lost. There is already demand for more detox services in the city, not less, and the potential loss of the YMCA detox facility would significantly increase the pressure on the system.

In fact, both the city of Saskatoon and the federal government have said they will commit funding for a short-term detox facility and they are looking to the provincial government to fund the project as well.

So far the NDP have indicated this is not a priority for them by remaining silent on the issue. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health explain why the NDP have not supported Saskatoon's request for a short-term detox facility when the federal government and the city have come to the table?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I know it's a long ways back over there but I think he may have just woken up. Because this issue was dealt with a week ago in *The StarPhoenix* when the Saskatoon District Health said we have money allocated from the Department of Health to our district and we are going to be working closely with the people in the detox centre project to provide money that comes from Health.

That's how we deal with it in Department of Health, is to work with the local health districts and make sure that they identify the needs that are there, and that's what we're doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the need for treatment centres to deal with drug and alcohol conditions in Saskatchewan is a very, very large issue and it's a great concern that so many young people are ending up with drug and alcohol addictions.

In fact the NDP is on record as having shared these concerns. A government press release launching Drug Awareness Week in November of 2000 quotes the former associate Health minister as saying, "Substance abuse isn't going away."

Another government news release from November 2001 quotes the Health minister as saying, "Substance abuse isn't going away." Déjà vu. In fact the same press release, Mr. Speaker, says that last year about 3,300 people under 20 years of age were admitted to in-patient, outpatient, and detoxification programs in Saskatchewan. So is the NDP's concern real or just rhetoric?

So, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: how much money is going into the program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as I explained before, and I know as explained by the CEO (chief executive officer) of the Saskatoon District Health Monday, a week ago, they are working with these people and setting it in the priorities for

Saskatoon District Health as it relates to that specific detox centre.

We know that throughout the province there are issues around drug and alcohol abuse and that's why we do have a system that's spread right across the province with addictions counsellors and many of the resources that are needed. We'll continue to support those things and we'll continue to work with the people of Saskatchewan who are working in this area to make sure that the services are provided.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Legal Services for Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance. Mr. Speaker, Crop Insurance spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year on legal bills. It's obviously a very lucrative contract to the firm that's going to . . . that receives the contract to do this work.

How much does crop insurance . . . How does crop insurance decide which law firm to give this work to and is it through an open competition or a tendering process, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Crop Insurance has a board, and the Crop Insurance board is responsible, Mr. Speaker, to oversee the kinds of contracts and projects that in fact . . . that are let by the crop insurance agency.

So if the member opposite is interested in knowing how that process works, I can provide for him in detail the Crop Insurance structure in terms of the way in which information is provided.

I say to the member opposite that we have a board, and that's . . . through the board in which those decisions are made, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Wil Olive is one of the directors of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance. Last year, Mr. Olive's law firm, Olive Waller Zinkhan & Waller, received about \$200,000 worth of legal work from Saskatchewan Crop Insurance. That represents nearly 90 per cent of all the legal work done for Crop Insurance that year.

What role did the board of directors play in deciding that Olive Waller Zinkhan & Waller should receive all this legal work and money from Crop Insurance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Across the province of Saskatchewan today you have a number of people who provide a variety of different services, Mr. Speaker, to a variety of different

corporations and companies.

You have auditors who provide particular services, Mr. Speaker, to corporations and companies. You have legal firms that provide services. You have accountants who provide services to a variety of different agencies and companies across the province. And on occasion, you'll find people who serve on the board of directors who are also people who work within various different companies.

And so it's not unusual, Mr. Speaker, to find somebody who's sitting as a lawyer in a particular law firm, and you might . . . or an accountant who serves in a particular accounting firm, to find them sitting on a particular board or agency within the department, or within the government, Mr. Speaker, or on a commission.

So this isn't an unusual practice in this province or for that matter anywhere in North America, Mr. Speaker — not an unusual practice to see people on those boards or commissions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the minister says that this isn't an unusual practice, but it seems somewhat unusual when one firm receives 90 per cent of the work and that firm has a member sitting on the board of directors, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister table the document showing that there was a fair and open competition to determine who will receive Saskatchewan Crop Insurance legal work. Is the minister willing to table all disclosure documents that Mr. Olive is required to submit under the conflict of interest section of The Crown Corporations Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely interesting question that the member asks.

And I would say to the member opposite, because he's . . . (inaudible) . . . by making the implication here, Mr. Speaker, is what he's doing. What he's saying, Mr. Speaker, here, what he's saying here, Mr. Speaker, is that Mr. Wil Olive is in fact influencing the work that's getting done in the law firm of which he works in, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what the member's saying here.

And I want the member to take that statement and to go outside and tell the public of Saskatchewan that Mr. Wil Olive is in fact, as a member of the Crop Insurance board, is influencing any kinds of contracts that it gets. And that's what I'd like the member opposite to say, Mr. Speaker. Because that's exactly what the member from . . . what the member is implying, Mr. Speaker. That's what he's implying.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the only person that's implying that there was something wrong here is the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, all that we're asking on that side of the House is if the minister will table the document so that everyone, all citizens of this province, know that there wasn't anything wrong with this tendering process. Will he table those documents, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the same question that the member stood in his place and asked me doing the estimates. And I said to the member opposite then, and I say to the member now, Mr. Speaker, that we have somebody today who's serving into . . . in the capacity today, Mr. Speaker, somebody who sits on the Crop Insurance board.

And we have a firm today of which the crop insurance agency gets legal services from.

And I say to the member opposite, if you have a concern about the . . .

The Speaker: — Speak to the . . .

Hon. Mr. Serby: — . . . should be alleging some wrongdoings outside of the legislature, Mr. Speaker. You should get out of this room and you should make those implications to the people of Saskatchewan, to the media, and to the public. Because, Mr. Speaker, this individual and this practice, Mr. Speaker, fits within the regulations and the policies of Sask . . . of the crop insurance company.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Financial Effect on Agriculture of Government Policies

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when Saskatchewan farm families are being forced to pay thousands of dollars more for crop insurance coverage this year, I'm sure that you can understand why they want to make sure that every dollar is accounted for and being spent wisely by the corporation.

Mr. Speaker, last week we read a letter from a Langenburg area farmer whose crop insurance and property tax bills are going to cost him 22,000 more dollars this year than last year. And the minister's response was to dismiss his concerns as the worst-case scenario.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have an e-mail from Lyle Brons of Lake Lenore who takes issue with the minister's comments. He farms 1,200 acres and he says he will pay \$4,300 more for the same crop and hail coverage as last year. Add that to the loss of his \$1,200 property tax rebate and he will add over \$5,500 more. And he says his costs will actually be more per acre than the farmer from Langenburg.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has promised in the past to reduce input costs for farmers. Why are they now increasing input costs by thousands of dollars?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have, on a number of

occasions, indicated the rationale for why it is that we have in fact taken out the spot loss hail. I've indicated that on a number of occasions.

But I have here, Mr. Speaker, that I want to quote for the record, a letter from the Canadian Crop Hail Association here in our province, and this is what they say. They say this:

The removal of the Spot Loss Hail subsidy from the government Crop Insurance Program puts business (business — private sector) on a level playing field . . . (which that opposition agrees with, to sell the best product at a very competitive price).

And then, Mr. Speaker, they go on to say this, Mr. Speaker. Then they go on to say this:

This is also good news (is what Mr. McQueen said, this is good news) for farmers . . .

The subsidy of more than \$20 million annually to the government Spot Loss Hail program in recent years has seriously undermined the private Crop Hail Industry . . . (in this province, Mr. Speaker).

And so what we've done, Mr. Speaker, is we've listened to the private sector. We've listened to the private sector and this is what the private sector goes on to say:

It puts scarce government dollars to the best use possible . . .

. . . alleviating risk and if no grass . . . and to provide funding for the grass and cattle program and yield coverage of this program.

Mr. Speaker, we support the . . .

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the producers of this province are also private business owners who have been harmed by the new crop insurance program and there are more of them than there are private crop insurance companies. Where is the consideration for the producers of this province?

Mr. Speaker, Lyle Brons says the situation on his 1,200-acre farm is no different than that of the farmer in Langenburg and that even . . . every farm family in Saskatchewan will face the same huge costs to purchase crop insurance. Mr. Brons goes on to say, and I quote:

I also would remind you (and this is a quote), Mr. Serby, that your government cancelled the GRIP program 10 years ago with a promise to replace it. Instead you've only increased our costs with tax increases and spending cutbacks. I urge you, Mr. Serby, to reconsider the decisions that you and your government have made. Give us the protection from disasters and taxes that we need.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP not only ignoring their promise to replace the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) but also saddling farm families with thousands of dollars in increased crop insurance this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, in this province what we've done is we've travelled across the province along with the Farm Support Review Committee, Mr. Speaker. The Farm Support Review Committee has travelled the province, Mr. Speaker, and talked with farmers and farm organizations and groups about what we should be doing in Saskatchewan in terms of the farm support, Mr. Speaker.

And you know what? Everybody in this province made a submission to the Farm Support Review Committee except the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker. Here we are a document of all the people who talk about what we should be doing in Saskatchewan and nowhere near, Mr. Speaker, does there appear a word from the Saskatchewan Party — not a word. And at that time the deputy critic of Agriculture had an opportunity to make a submission — not a word, Mr. Speaker.

So what's happened here, Mr. Speaker, is that the member opposite quotes, and I want to say what the member opposite quotes when she was asked about what we should be doing to help Saskatchewan farmers. And we were all talking about getting additional federal help. And this is what the member from Watrous said:

(Hartberger suggests, Hartberger suggests there is no) . . . Harpauer suggests that there is no more federal dollars coming so it's time to give up on asking the federal government for any support, Mr. Speaker.

There's only one party that's given up on farmers; there's only one group of people given up on farmers and it's that party right over there, Mr. Speaker, who've given up on farmers across Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Research Agreement signed with Pavement Scientific International

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce today the Department of Highways and Transportation has signed a research agreement with Pavement Scientific International of Saskatoon.

This research agreement involves exciting new technology that we are very confident will allow us to rebuild more roads for less money. It promises to be a cost-effective option to rebuild and strengthen Saskatchewan highways.

Even though we are putting record amounts of money into our Highways and Transportation budget Saskatchewan still faces some challenging issues on our highway system. The department is responsible for thousands of kilometres of highways and roads across this province that are deteriorating under heavy volumes of traffic that they must carry.

And with Saskatchewan being in the unique position of having the most kilometres of highway per capita in all of Canada, we are critically aware of the challenges we face, especially with

very minimal federal funds to assist us.

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just repeat the preceding paragraph. With Saskatchewan being in the unique position of having the most kilometres of highway per capita in all of Canada, we are critically aware of the challenges we face, especially with very minimal federal funds to assist us.

That is why we are excited about this research partnership we have developed with Pavement Scientific International. This research shows much promise in helping to . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are very excited because this research shows much promise in helping to strengthen our rural roads using a blend of materials called TerraCem.

In 1998, the department began phasing in the use of TerraCem on several highway improvement projects. The department has completed 17 different test projects across the province in the northern, central, and southern regions. In total we now have approximately 100 kilometres of highway completed over the past four years using this technology.

After each section is completed, the department and PSI monitor the sections and evaluate their performance over a number of years. The results are very, very encouraging.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged that a state of the art technology is being developed here in this province. And I am pleased to inform you and the members of this House today of this new 5-year, 350-kilometre road research and strengthening agreement that will take the department in a new direction for rebuilding our TMS (thin membrane surface) roads.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see some initiative from the Department of Highways and some new technology that is being introduced today, and I certainly applaud the idea of new technology.

It's very interesting, just recently I spoke about a new rubber asphalt technology and it kind of fell by deaf ears. We have a rubber plant in this province, as you're probably aware of, and they have been doing a lot of research with another company in the United States and yet the Department of Highways here have seen fit not even to conduct a test section of highway with the rubber asphalt people.

Now we're entering into an agreement with Pavement Scientific International. And I don't know enough about that organization yet, but it's obvious to me again it's the NDP methodology of picking winners and losers.

Mr. Speaker, if this is an extremely cost-effective option to strengthen and rebuild highways, I would applaud that because we know under the last 10 years of the NDP government they've abandoned highways, they've abandoned roads in rural Saskatchewan. We've been living on extremely treacherous roads for the last number of years as witnessed two years ago by the town and community of Val Marie and Climax — they had to repair their own road. This would be an ideal section of road for a test section, at least fill in the potholes.

Mr. Speaker, I find it always amazing when I listen to the government and here we have it again, quote:

We are putting record amounts of money into our highways.

And I'd like to emphasize this:

We're putting record amounts of money into our highways.

Well, Mr. Speaker, from the Minister of Finance's own budget, it's \$11 million less than last year and yet this year is a record. It just goes to show how their accounting practices really work on that side of the House.

Another little item, Mr. Speaker, is the NDP have a propensity again of comparing things to per capita. We have the most kilometres of highway per capita. Well if we grew this province by 100,000 people would we have the most kilometres of highway per capita? We have continual out-migration and yet we still wish to use this on a per capita basis.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the fact if this . . . if this scientific international partnership, if it chose an awful lot of province, it'll strengthen the roads in rural Saskatchewan. I am . . . I am just hoping that the savings that this is touted to be used as will bring a bunch of the highways in rural Saskatchewan up to a standard for heavy haul, up to a national standard and also to a standard that people can drive on them without fear of popping over a ridge and hitting a pothole or hitting a culvert that's been washed out or something.

Mr. Speaker, I do applaud . . . I do applaud any scientific research into the Highway department. We have had some as I . . . as I mention with the asphalt rubber. There's been 30 years of experience with the asphalt rubber and yet we have elected not to even continue with a test program using the asphalt. So, Mr. Speaker, I applaud the government to go into contract negotiations with a company if it's going to improve our highways in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 27 – The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Amendment Act, 2002/Loi de 2002 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur l'exécution des ordonnances alimentaires

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 27, The Enforcement of Maintenance Orders

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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a response to written question 102 and a little surprised there's only one today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Question 102 has been responded to.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Financial Support for Agriculture

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there can be no question that agriculture is extremely important to our province . . . to the province of Saskatchewan. And there could be no question that the producers in our province are facing particularly difficult challenges the last few years in our province.

They have had to face a continuing decrease in commodity prices, an increase in their input costs, the absence of any type of safety net program in this province which has been sort of the luxury of many of their provincial counterparts, abandonment from the federal government for anything of any meaningful purpose, and the worst drought in the history of the province.

And now, on top of all this, the producers of this province have to face the gutting of their crop insurance program by their own NDP government. This program has been available to them, Mr. Speaker, for a number of years. I actually myself can't remember not having crop insurance available. It's a program that basically has been their last remaining safety net, other than NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account), and the NDP government has blamed the producers of the province for most, if not all, of the difficulties of the province.

They cite the drought and the downturn in agriculture as the major reason of why there are 11,300 fewer people working in the year 2001. They blame the producers of the province for the increased out-migration in our province. And during the third quarter budget, the Minister of Finance cited the downturn in agriculture as a reason for the \$478 million deficit, and he warned the people of Saskatchewan that the budgetary problem will be bigger in 2002-2003 when the real impact of the 2001 drought shows up by less income tax collected.

So they have defined a definite problem and they've said that that problem is within the agriculture sector of our province. So how did they address that problem, Mr. Speaker? How did they . . . What did they do to attempt to reverse the negative trends that we're seeing in the statistics on our province? And how did they help the farm families within our province, Mr. Speaker?

Well they decided to increase the premiums of crop insurance while reducing the coverage. So that was very, very helpful. The Minister of Agriculture has told the producers of this province a number of times, in a number of forums, that his government is going to enhance the crop insurance. As recently as February 25, the Minister of Agriculture told the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture that an enhanced crop insurance program is also on his list of improvements. And he also said, and I will quote . . . I'm quoting from the *Review* dated February 25. I quote:

If we get into a drought situation this spring, crop insurance would mitigate some of the problems that in the past we've had to go to correct with emergency aid money.

Well I think the producers of this province, Mr. Speaker, were more than mildly surprised when they opened their crop insurance application forms to see how it was enhanced.

And I think it was best described by a farm reporter that many of us are familiar with, and that is Kevin Hursh, and he wrote in the *Humboldt Journal* on March 21:

The provincial government made some interesting choices in the Crop Insurance Program which has finally been announced in 2002.

For grain producers, the biggest change is that spot loss hail coverage has been dropped. This has been a popular option for many years. In fact, since hail coverage through Crop Insurance was cheaper than buying private hail insurance, this option helped retain farmers in the program.

In previous years, spot loss hail coverage was available when buying 50, 60 or 70 per cent of yield coverage. It wasn't available if you bought 80 per cent coverage.

Ideally, that program should have been enhanced so that spot loss hail was . . . available at 80 per cent. Instead, spot loss hail coverage has been cut altogether.

While the change is a step backwards for farmers, the move has a certain logic for a government looking for somewhere to save money on the program . . .

And it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, the members on the opposite side, on the NDP side are getting rather excited. They're saying it's just simply not so. And I'm sure Kevin Hursh will be more than interested to know that they don't believe anything that he writes.

Not surprising the Minister of Agriculture has given a reason to the . . . to ourselves and to the producers of this province, he's given them a reason why the premiums have risen anywhere from 30 to 300 per cent and the spot loss hail coverage has been dropped completely.

And the reason that he's giving the producers of this province isn't entirely surprising, Mr. Speaker, because the reason is one we've heard before. It's simple, it's the federal government's fault . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's always the federal government's fault. So on March 2, Murray Mandryk wrote:

Serby (was) . . . deputy premier, (sorry, this is a quote, Mr. Speaker.) Serby (was) . . . deputy premier for an NDP government that campaigned in 1999 on a promise to: “Continue fighting until Ottawa gets the message” about Saskatchewan agriculture.

Right now, Saskatchewan farmers would be happy to see that the provincial government (got) . . . the message.

The current crop insurance dilemma demonstrates a worrisome disconnection . . .

(The coalition) . . . government . . . is either oblivious to the . . . root cause(s) of (Saskatchewan’s) . . . economic problems like agriculture or is simply so overwhelmed by (their severity) . . . that it . . . can’t come up with a single creative idea . . . to . . . address (them effectively.) . . .

Given the NDP’s penchant to blame agriculture . . . (for) most problems, one . . . (would) assume it’s the latter.

But . . . (to hear) a Department of Agriculture official suggest that crop insurance is just one of many government priorities . . . is . . . a little frightening.

Maintaining a properly managed and funded crop insurance program in these economic and weather conditions isn’t just another (round or) one of the government’s many priorities.

This is Saskatchewan. Agriculture accounts for 11 per cent of the jobs and nine per cent of the GDP. There is drought out there.

Frankly, using . . . lack-of-money (as an) excuse isn’t just tiresome — it’s unacceptable.

A reader (maybe) . . . made an interesting observation the other day that bears repeating: How . . . (can a province have a) rainy day fund (but no fund) . . . no (funding) to fight drought?

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I have had the opportunity to question the Minister of Agriculture on . . . last Friday in the Committee of Finance in the estimates. And we asked him to explain to us the reason why he and his NDP government found the need to drop the spot loss hail insurance and to increase the premiums for the remaining coverage for anywhere between 30 to 300 per cent. And quite frankly, I found his answers weak, to say the least, and his numbers simply do not wash.

The minister told us, and he told the producers of this province, that the federal government did not ante up their share of the funding. Now we could debate that and, you know, discuss what Mr. Vanclief in Ottawa has told us — which basically he said, it’s a loan; the minister owed him the money.

But let’s just take the minister, what he’s saying, at face value. Let’s just take it at face value and let’s do the math on all this. Last year the federal government transferred \$195 million to the province to cover — and this is according to the Minister of Agriculture — cash advance crop insurance and NISA. Last year the provincial government put \$130 million into those

same programs and the producers put in their applicable premiums which, for the spot loss hail insurance coverage alone, was \$23 million, Mr. Speaker.

This year . . . now the minister is saying, no, it was only 17. Well when we asked a written question, the answer to the written question that we received was the producers put \$23 million towards spot loss crop insurance. This year the federal government is putting . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I don’t know. The federal government, according to the minister, is putting in \$195 million — the same as last year.

The provincial government is putting in \$130 million plus \$14 million which comes to an increase of up to \$144 million. The producers will not be putting any money in for the spot loss hail, simply because it’s not available to them, not because they’re not willing to pay a premium.

But they will be putting in 30 to 300 per cent more for their all-risk premiums. So it doesn’t matter how often I add this up, there’s more funding in crop insurance than last year, and yet the producers have had the spot loss hail ripped away from them.

Now, the Minister of Agriculture has said that the coverage has been increased. But again, if you do the math, I mean 50 per cent coverage is still 50 per cent coverage, 70 per cent coverage is still 70 per cent coverage. So I don’t see how he can, you know, make it fly that the coverage has increased.

And he’s also said that the commodity prices that they’re insuring has increased. And that is true. That is true. They have assigned higher prices to the commodities, but it poses another question, Mr. Speaker. Why did the premiums increase by 30 to 300 per cent when the commodity prices only increased by 7 to the absolute maximum of 19 per cent. The math doesn’t add up again.

And the minister has told us in the House that if the federal government would just listen. If they would just listen, and if they would allow the province to take the bonus portion of the interest in NISA and apply it to crop insurance then — and I’m quoting from *Hansard* is what he said:

. . . had we been able to get a bit more, the answer might be that we’d (be) . . . able to offer a similar product (as last year).

Now the provincial contribution to the bonus portion of the interest on NISA is \$9 million, according to the minister. And the federal contribution is the same, which makes for a total of \$18 million. So we only need \$18 million more to retain the crop loss hail coverage.

This year the federal government, in the words of the minister, contributed the same amount as last year for the cash advance, crop insurance, and NISA which is \$195 million.

The provincial government put in an additional \$14 million which means there’s a shortfall of \$4 million.

I would bet that the producers of this province would be willing to pay \$4 million more in premiums. And if they did, it would

still mean that the premiums they pay would be less than what's being required for them to pay this year. And they could retain spot loss hail coverage.

I'm going to end what I have to say today, Mr. Speaker, with a press release from the Manitoba government dated January 17, 2002. And I found it rather interesting, because my understanding — and I could be corrected by the Minister of Agriculture, and I'm sure he will be more than willing to correct me if I'm wrong — but I've been led to understand that Manitoba also got an additional \$20 million from the federal government to help them pay for their programs last year. So they also have this debt load of \$20 million and the federal government is treating them in the same manner that it's treating the Saskatchewan government.

(14:45)

And yet the press release from Manitoba is saying:

Higher coverage levels at no extra cost to producers, a pilot program for pasture insurance and an increase to the number of insurable crops are among the highlights included in the 2002 Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation (MCIC) program.

The reduction in premium rates over the last two years in combination with higher grain . . . (values), which are forecast to increase by 10 per cent, are encouraging developments for producers.

It appears like the Manitoba government has been able to manage the difficulties with the \$20 million from the federal government they're supposed to repay. The Saskatchewan government maybe needs to know how to manage that as well.

So with that I would like to move the motion, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government to reverse its decision to pay off its own debt to the federal government at the cost of farmers through significantly higher crop insurance premiums and cancellation of the spot loss hail coverage.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to second the motion for the member from Watrous speaking to the fact that the provincial government has been once again downloading on every farmer in Saskatchewan.

The other day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talked about a farmer in my area — Arden Roulston. And I'd like to read it into the record the letter that Arden sent me because we only stated some of the facts in that letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I'm quoting now — and he's talking about Saskatchewan Crop Insurance and property tax rebate — Arden says and I quote:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent changes made to the Saskatchewan crop insurance program and the elimination of the property tax rebate. My father and I farm approximately 5,400 acres, which provides incomes for two families.

That's contrary to what the minister had said, that this is an exceptionally large farmer. Really, in today's reality, a 2,500 acre farmer is becoming more the norm than the exception.

Arden goes on to say:

When comparing crop insurance rates from 2001 crop year, coverage is up 11 per cent. However, the premiums due have risen 35 per cent, even though our experience discount increased an additional 6 per cent. As well, the program no longer includes the high price option which allowed better coverage if grain prices were increased. The spot loss hail coverage has also been deleted, which will force us to buy solely from a private insurer, resulting in a 77 per cent increase.

77 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker. Not 7, as the Minister of Agriculture has stated before. 77 per cent increase.

At a time when there's not a farmer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this province that could stand any more expenditures and any more costs for their farming operation, what do we see but this NDP government, who's got so used to downloading on the farming sector in this province without even batting an eye, they do it again when they can't balance their books.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, he goes on to say:

As a result, the insurance changes alone will cost an additional \$17,710. The elimination of the property tax rebate will cost approximately \$4,150.

And then he goes on to say, Mr. Speaker:

The combined costs of these two program changes will result in a total increase of \$21,860. This is simply not acceptable.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture minister can chirp across, but I would like that minister to go out and talk to that farmer and explain to him where he finds that \$21,000 that he paid for . . . more than he paid in last year's crop insurance, Mr. Speaker.

He goes on to say:

We are also concerned that the federal NISA program may be terminated.

And maybe the minister could respond to that later on. Maybe he knows something that we don't, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It wouldn't surprise me if they pulled their money out of that also.

We encourage you to lobby the provincial and federal governments to keep the NISA program. It is our opinion

that this is an efficient program that works with a minimal cost of administration and that benefits all farmers as compared to some of the other recent farm programs.

He goes on to say:

As you are aware, the farm economy is in a precarious position, with very few young people starting to farming.

And the Agriculture minister should know this. He says there are very few young people starting to farm. And with program cuts like he's done to agriculture, there's going to be even less young farmers starting in.

He goes on to say:

Other countries will continue to subsidize their farm economy. Unless our governments develop beneficial agriculture policies to compete with other countries, this industry will not survive.

And many farmers across the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are saying the exact same thing. Unless this government and the federal government gets in place a long-term safety net program — which, by the way, they promised after they cancelled GRIP 10 years ago and never followed through with that promise — he says farmers will not survive in Saskatchewan.

Farmers cannot afford any further program reductions, they need programs to be enhanced. (Arden Roulston, Langenburg, Saskatchewan).

The Agriculture minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should take a drive out there this weekend and explain to Arden and his dad — and for that matter, if he's out there and would spend more than eight minutes like they did when they got off the bus in rural Saskatchewan — take a half an hour, explain to the Langenburg area farmers how are they supposed to survive with this government in power, cutting, and depleting all the agriculture policy plans that we have in this province like crop insurance and sending money time over and time again back to Mr. Vanclief, while at the same time blaming Mr. Vanclief for all their woes in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Watrous in question period today talked about another farmer. And I think the Agriculture minister was trying to let the impression be out there with the media and the public that this is an isolated case, this is a large farmer.

Well hello, Mr. Agriculture minister, we have a 1,200-acre farmer. Now this might just be an average farmer in the minister's mind, but this member goes on to say that his crop insurance expenses are going to be up with the education tax rebate cut \$5,500. Well that hurts this 1,200-acre farmer every bit as much as it does my farmer from Langenburg, even though he's on a bigger scale, because this guy has less acres to pay the increased cost for crop insurance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, this budget that this government brought in, once again, it resembles the ones they

brought in in the early 90s when they dropped the GRIP program. And at that time — this minister can argue if he wants, but they did — they sent over \$250 million back to the federal government; that same federal government that they use every day in this House as an excuse for all the problems that farmers in Saskatchewan have.

Well yes, the farmers in Saskatchewan have a problem, because instead of matching those dollars that come to our farmers, they send it back to the same people that they're blaming for our problems.

Mr. Speaker, they also . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, they also at the same time, come out two years ago with \$25 million a year in education refunds to the farmers on their property tax. What do they do this year when it gets a little tougher, and they've already had one deficit budget, and heading into the second one?

Well, number one, they download on the seniors of Saskatchewan by jacking the long-term care rates from 1,500 to 3,800 and then they go to their favourite, favourite spot to dump on — the farmers of Saskatchewan.

They cut the Agriculture budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. From what they estimated in Agriculture to spend last year, to what they estimate this year, they've cut it \$108 million — \$108 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Agriculture budget for this province is somewhere under \$300 million. In 1990, when this government came to power, do you know what was spent on agriculture in the province of Saskatchewan by those bad Tories, and that bad Grant Devine — \$1 billion-plus on agriculture for the farmers of Saskatchewan.

So this government doesn't need to point the finger at any previous governments when it comes to standing behind agriculture. They should instead take a look at what's been done in the past by governments and premiers and Agriculture ministers that have stood behind our farmers and helped them through bad times, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not 250 million but it's actually probably going to hurt as much considering the situation the farmers are in.

This time last year the federal government sent Saskatchewan \$17.4 million to be put into spot loss hail, the provincial government put in 17.4 million, and guess what? We cut spot loss hail.

And the minister said, when I made the suggestion that he was sending it back to Ottawa, he said, oh, no, trust me. We invested it in our farmers.

Well they haven't seen anything yet, and I doubt, under that minister and that government, they'll ever see a nickel of that money. If you have the nerve to download on the seniors of Saskatchewan, you're not above hiding \$34 million from the farmers in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it goes on, and on, and on. The minister

talked the other day about how the changes to municipal hail insurance will better the farmers going from \$100 coverage an acre to where they've upped it to 125, and he insinuated that that would make it cheaper.

Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I farmed for a number of years, and I don't know how he can figure that made it cheaper. It's a convenience — I think farmers will applaud it — but it certainly will not make it \$1 cheaper for farmers of Saskatchewan.

Then to explain his position, he goes on to let the cat out of the bag and tell farmers they've been paying a 3 per cent premium tax on hail insurance. Well once again, hello, Mr. Agriculture Minister. Now farmers are very upset that this government is also taxing premiums on hail insurance. If that minister and that government wanted to help farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they could drop that tax and really help farmers in Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — It's a pleasure for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to enter into this debate on a very, on a very worthwhile topic. I think we all, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Would all hon. members please come to order. I'm having difficulty hearing the member from Regina Northeast.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a very worthwhile topic to be discussing here in private members' day, Mr. Speaker, as we all know that agriculture is a very important part of our Canadian economy and agriculture is also a very important part of our Saskatchewan economy.

And I believe, Mr. Speaker, even the members opposite would agree with me when I say the Saskatchewan agricultural sector is world class. And Saskatchewan farmers can compete with anybody anywhere in the world if it's given . . . if they're given a level playing field.

And, Mr. Speaker, if we look back at the history of the development of agriculture in Saskatchewan here, we notice it has evolved over time. And I'm sure each and every one of us, whether we were born on the farm or born in town, had relatives on the farm; if we were born in town, we've probably, many of us, spent our summer months visiting our grandfathers or our uncles on the farm. And we spent some time on that farm.

And we realize back in those days when many of us were youngsters, that the farm primarily consisted of a mixed farm operation — there was grain being produced; there was livestock on the farm; it was chickens — it was a mixed operation. And for the most part, farmers sort of used that mixed operation to self-insure themselves. Because if there was a crop disaster, the livestock end would pull them through, and it was a sort of a balancing act.

But there was . . . there are in farming, there are conditions beyond the farmer's control, of course that . . . primarily that of

weather conditions, of moisture, whether the rains come at the right time, and so on and so forth.

But as agriculture evolved somewhere around the early '60s, and I think it was about 1961, to recognize there was a need to introduce a program, an insurance program — it was later called Saskatchewan Crop Insurance — but that program was designed to take the humps and the valleys out of, out of situations that were beyond farmers' control — primarily the weather. And it would take out the humps of a disaster of a drought or a disaster in the fall, a wet fall, that downgraded the grain and in many cases it wasn't harvested. I can remember one or two years when . . . in this province where much of the grain that was produced in this province sat out all winter. And that was . . . dramatic impacts upon farmers.

(15:00)

And as agriculture evolved it moved away from simply being a way of life into a major, major business as we're experiencing today. And our farmers certainly recognized a need to have some type of an insurance that would take the humps and the valleys out of their farm income that would give them that protection.

Now, Mr. Speaker, nobody, nobody in the agriculture field or anywhere else believes that crop insurance is a revenue-generating program. What it is, is exactly what it is. It's insurance. It insures the farmers for the bare costs of investment. In a lot of cases, Mr. Speaker, the cost of farm input has — it's dramatically increased over the last number of years — has brought it to a level where farmers realize that crop insurance is a must. It is a safety net that cushions them in the event of that disaster.

But as cropping and as farming and agriculture in Saskatchewan evolved into many different facets, so has crop insurance. Crop insurance started out I think in the early '60s basically insuring two crops. I think it was basically wheat and barley. Then it expanded to oats and oil seeds and then expanded beyond that to where today crop insurance is a multi-facet program that covers not only the oil and the cereal grain sector but also covers livestock and forage production.

And we see that as a need, as a result of the diversification of agriculture. And that diversification of course is led by our farmers in a very positive way. But in order to do these things, in order to develop programs that will meet the changing needs and the changing challenges in agriculture, crop insurance evolves that way. And they have programs that take into account new crops that do not have a history of production in this province. They have a program that will cause that level of protection to be there.

They're also working on expanding crop insurance into forage production, and not only for the hay production, but also for the pasture production. In order to do this, you just don't go out and do it. You have to run test projects. And that's exactly what's going on. And they're proven to be very, very acceptable to farmers.

The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, as crop insurance has evolved, so has the financing of it by all three participants —

the federal government, the provincial government, and of course the producer. And at one time the federal government shared the costs of crop insurance on a percentage basis. That means if there was an increase in coverage because of an increase in sign-ups or an increase in the value of the commodity being insured, the federal government would pick up the same percentage.

But in the 1980s — I believe it was in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker — the government of the day, the forerunner of the members opposite, decided to move away from that and to move to more of a fixed program where the province would be responsible for 40 per cent of funding of agriculture programs and the federal government would be responsible for 60 per cent.

That has now evolved into a fixed federal participation. And by fixed I mean, Mr. Speaker, it's fixed at a dollar value. So as commodity prices increase and the value of the insured crop increases, the federal government's participation does not increase. As participation in the programs increase, and therefore costs of delivering that program increase, the federal government's portion of the cost of that program does not increase.

So as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan government is faced with an issue of: do you reduce the coverage which is already only at a bare minimum or do you step up to the plate and support Saskatchewan agriculture and Saskatchewan farms? Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say our government stepped up to the plate and did the right thing by supporting Saskatchewan farmers.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite will suggest far and wide that they have a plan. They have even suggested that they have a plan for Saskatchewan agriculture.

Well even the . . . interesting part, Mr. Speaker, is that not too long ago the former critic for the opposition, Mr. Billy Boyd, critic of Agriculture, suggested . . . back in about January someplace he made an announcement that he would soon be laying out the Sask Party's plan for agriculture. And then in their busted tour of Saskatchewan, he announced then that he was still working on the plan. Well Mr. Boyd isn't here anymore and quite frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't see any signs of their plan either.

I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker, they might have a plan. They know how devastating that plan would be to Saskatchewan, to Saskatchewan agriculture, and they full well know that if they made their plan available to the public that their support level that they're seeing wane in rural Saskatchewan would slide even further.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to just wind up here by saying that I'm very proud of our government. Our government's stepping to the plate and putting an extra \$14 million into crop insurance — \$14 million to ensure that we have an adequate, proper program to ensure the long-term agriculture as a thriving industry in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move an amendment to the motion and it will read as follows. I move:

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

support the provincial government's efforts of protecting Saskatchewan farmers and farm families by increasing provincial funding to the crop insurance program despite the federal government's decision to cut back their cost share.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate the opportunity to join in this debate regarding crop insurance. As someone who's very interested in the future of agriculture in our province, I think this debate is very critical.

Unfortunately I will not be able to support the motion by the member from Watrous as it stands today, but I will be seconding the motion by my colleague here from Regina Northeast.

Now I believe the crop insurance program it's . . . as it's announced in the . . . by the government is solid in its goal of supporting farmers, particularly in this tough time as all of us in Saskatchewan face difficult choices. But we need to stay the road to stability.

And this debate is an important debate for Saskatchewan farmers. The crop insurance program is an extremely important program for our producers. Each spring Saskatchewan producers invest in excess of \$3 billion in inputs as they seed over 35 million acres of dryland crop. In many cases producers are investing their life savings or borrowing against their future earnings to put that crop in the ground.

Despite advances in technology and best management practices, every producer knows that this investment is still very much in the hands of mother nature. And that is why it's essential that producers have access to an effective crop insurance program to ensure that producers are able to protect their investment.

When Saskatchewan started to design this year's crop insurance program, we were faced with a number of challenges and factors to consider. Crop insurance coverage levels were increasing as a result of an increase in crop insurance prices and an overall increase in average yields in this province. This resulted in increased premiums for all parties.

Producers were asking for improved coverage options, particularly for grazing lands which province-wide coverage was not available in 2001. The 2001 crop insurance program had cost about \$13 million more than projected as a result of increased participation and producers making better use of the program.

As well, the federal government refused to put additional funding into the crop insurance program despite higher program costs. The federal government refused to make changes to other safety net programs to help free up additional funding for the crop insurance program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to discuss these challenges in a little more detail so that the members of the legislature have even a greater understanding of the framework within the decisions to be made.

First, the crop insurance prices in 2002 are an average 13 per cent higher than in 2001. As well, coverage levels are a result of good production experience up from the 2000 production year. This has resulted in an average yield increase of about 2 per cent across the province, while higher prices and higher coverage levels are obviously good news for farmers as they reflect stronger . . . (inaudible) . . . prices and improved production capability at the farm level.

The higher overall coverage levels also mean increased insurance premiums costs for all parties. This crop insurance is like any other insurance product though, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you purchase insurance, you expect to pay higher premiums for higher dollar coverage.

As a result of higher prices and coverage levels, in the absence of no changes to the program, all parties would have seen their premium costs increase about 15 per cent.

The second factor facing the province is that producers were looking for improved coverage levels. In 2001 the province offered a rainfall pilot program for forage acres in two regions of the province. Livestock producers found this program very much to their liking and they asked for a rainfall option for grazing lands to be made available for a province-wide basis.

This is an important enhancement for good crop insurance as the crop insurance program has always had difficulty providing an adequate and an administratively cost-effective option for livestock producers who wanted to purchase insurance on their grazing lands.

And yes, there are a few wrinkles in this program, but producers are responding very favourably to this option.

In 2002 the program will cover about three and a quarter million acres of grazing land in Saskatchewan. And we need to remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this coverage was not previously available for most producers and extremely important for expanding cattle sector, particularly given the current dry conditions being experienced.

In addition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we thought it would be important to test the pilot rainfall program based on the same principles as the forage program.

By testing this program on a small scale in 2002, as a supplemental program to the all-peril program, crop insurance can determine producers' response to the product and assess where there would be useful addition to the program on a province-wide basis for future years.

Now the third important point to recognize in settling this framework within this year's crop insurance decisions, were made the fact that the 2001 crop insurance program was actually more than originally budgeted. These over-the-budget costs were a result of increased producer participation in the program, and producers purchasing higher coverage levels than

previous years.

These higher costs mean that the premiums for each of the province and the federal government were \$13 million more than projected in 2001.

In the case of the province we covered the over-budget expenses in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. However, in the case of the federal government, they paid their share of premiums all right, but they clawed back the over expenditure out of the 2002-2003 federal safety net allocation for Saskatchewan. So not only do you have an increase in expected 2002 crop insurance costs, but you also have less federal dollars available for the 2002 program.

And this shows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the perverse effects of the federal safety net allocation where federal risk management funding is fixed at \$95 million annually, regardless of what the producers' needs are or what the program actually cost.

The province asked for the federal government, on numerous occasions over the winter months, to make more federal money available for programs for Saskatchewan farmers. Did the federal government recognize the needs of the industry? No. They refused to find more money. The federal government said it would only make available \$80 million of federal funding for the program in 2002.

The province asked the federal government to adjust other programs to free up more federal money for the crop insurance program. Saskatchewan, along with most other provinces, requested that the 3 per cent interest bonus in the NISA program be eliminated so that money could be redirected to other programming.

In Saskatchewan that would have meant an additional \$9.5 million of federal funding, and 9.5 million of provincial funding that would have been available for the crop insurance program. That extra \$19 million of government funding, that could have been used to further enhance the crop insurance program, or to reduce producers' share of the premiums cost in 2002.

And did the federal government recognize the needs of the industry. No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the federal government refused to make any changes to the NISA program to free up this extra additional funding. Again the federal government said that there would be no more than \$80 million of federal funding available for the 2002 federal crop insurance program.

(15:15)

Well in light of these factors, the province had to make some very difficult decisions in designing the 2002 crop insurance program, but we made them in a strategic way to ensure that the 2002 program will continue to be an effective program for Saskatchewan producers.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, clearly as producers examine the facts around the 2002 crop insurance program, they see that the program has increased its funding commitment to the program by \$14 million and the province has maintained its share of the all-peril crop insurance premiums at the previous level. The province has made the program more effective for livestock

producers through the addition of the forage rainfall program on a province-wide basis and by adding crop rainfall pilot program.

Producers also see that the federal government has not been doing all that it should be in terms of providing an effective programming for the agriculture sector in this province. The federal government has reduced the funds available for the crop insurance in 2002 and they've reduced their overall cost for sharing on this program.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the program is an excellent program and I call on the members opposite to come on board and see their plan for a better crop insurance program. I think this is fine, so I'll be seconding the motion to amend the original. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to enter into this debate, a debate dealing with this government's crop insurance program and the way they've reduced coverage, increased costs, and gutted the spot loss hail option.

I find it somewhat ironic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have that side of the House move an amendment to our motion saying that their government is increasing their support to crop insurance while the federal government has reduced theirs. It seems that we're getting mixed messages from this minister and this government.

When you initially . . . When the Minister of Agriculture initially announced the crop insurance program for 2002, he was somewhat . . . was apologetic to the farmers of this province. He said, well it's a tough year, we're in a tough financial situation and the feds have cut back on their contribution to crop insurance, and so therefore we've had to make some changes and this is as good a program as we can offer — blaming the federal government.

Yet when the minister was pressed to come up with details as to the levels of funding by both levels of government, he says, well just a minute now. Just a minute, he said. He said, yes well I think the way the funding program works is that Mr. Vanclief and his government were supposed to put in \$195 million each year over the three-year period and we're supposed to put in 130.

And now it seems to me . . . We're not sure exactly what the federal government put in but . . . oh yes just a minute. Now I remember. Now I remember that over the two years the federal government is putting their \$195 million in each year. So we really . . . there seems to be a fair bit of confusion.

When we talk to the federal Minister of Agriculture's people in Ottawa, they tell us that this government and this Minister of Agriculture needed some help last year with C-SAP II (Canada-Saskatchewan Assistance Program II). So Mr. Vanclief says, well okay, listen. We realize that this is an additional strain on your budget and this year we'll loan you some money, but remember you've got to pay it back in 2002.

So now the minister . . . when the Minister of Agriculture is asked whether this is in fact the scenario, he seems to get quite confused. He doesn't know whether he actually got the money last year and if he's got to pay it back this year. But yet he will . . . he admitted in the House last Friday that the federal government did put in their \$195 million in the last two years.

And then he goes on to tell the farmers of Saskatchewan, because the federal government didn't put in their money — and he admitted in the House on Friday that they in fact did put it in — therefore we've got to downscale crop insurance; we've got to cut the spot loss hail because that bad federal government isn't living up to their obligations.

Well it's kind of interesting, he also said that we have to put in — the we referring to the provincial government — have to put in \$14 million more this year.

Well now if you stand back from his argument and look at it, well certainly if you're repaying a loan and you have to maintain your commitment — you've signed an agreement to put in \$130 million each year for three years — and you put in your \$130 million last year and then . . . and you borrowed some money from the federal government and now this year you have to repay it, well naturally you'd have to put more money in, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think maybe that's the explanation.

I asked the minister to table documents in the House to show what the commitments were under this program, what payments were in the last two years. I mean if a minister of agriculture is using that type of an argument you'd think that he would have the figures right at his fingertips, but not this minister. He seems to get confused; he seems to not know his facts and to this day, to this time, I still don't have those figures. He said oh I'll get it to you right away, and we don't have it. And I know why we won't be getting it.

I challenge the minister to table those figures, a copy of those agreements, and table the amount of dollars that each level of government has put into these programs to clarify the situation. But I don't think we're going to get it.

Do you know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because the facts won't support his argument, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The facts won't support his arguments. He's trying to play the old money shell game — now we got it, now we don't. And he's extended that into this year's crop insurance program — the loopy lottery, the member from Estevan refers to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So then to try and smooth over some of the additional . . . the hurt to Saskatchewan farmers that's been outlined by myself and other members of this caucus in the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture issued a press release dated April 9 heralding the increased coverage of municipal hail and saying, and I quote:

A move that should decrease insurance costs to farmers.

Raising, raising the amount of insurance that a farmer can insure with municipal hail from \$100 an acre to 125. And this minister is telling Saskatchewan farmers that this is going to

decrease their costs. Well, I'm not sure where that minister got his information from.

And I doubt whether he even looked into hail insurance programs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've been involved in this farming business for over 30 years and hail is the biggest risks to our crops in those 30 years and every year we have to, we have to carry a fairly significant level of hail insurance. It seems that in our area and in a large part of my constituency, and as a matter of fact across this province, there are areas that . . . where hail, as I said, is the most significant risk to crop loss and farmers insuring . . . have to insure at fairly significant levels to protect themselves against that loss.

And I've been a customer of municipal hail for many years and I can't see, Mr. Minister, where increasing the level of coverage from 100 to \$125 an acre is going to decrease my costs. Municipal hail has always been competitive but they've never been the lowest insurer and they've never been the highest. But the things that are talked about in this press release, Mr. Deputy Speaker, make no . . . absolutely no sense and the farmers of this province know that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So what does . . . what else does the minister have to offer? He's taken . . . \$35 million is what . . . was the amount of dollars that both levels of government put into the hail . . . spot loss hail option. That money is not there now, but according to the minister it may be there — we're not sure. And so . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's a good question. Where is it? What has the minister done with it?

We had the crop insurance program funded at \$195 million from the federal government and 130 from the provincial government. We had that program last year. It funded the spot loss hail. The minister admitted that the federal government is putting in the same amount as they did the year before. The minister says his government is putting in \$14 million more. Certainly crop insurance coverage on the multi-peril option have increased somewhat, but they haven't increased to that level, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we would like to know: where is that \$35 million? What has the minister done with it? He's taken it and put it into his rainfall roulette program. We've asked him on a number of occasions, what's the cost of this little gaming option that he's put into the program? He doesn't know, as many things. We wonder really what this minister does know about crop insurance.

It seems like this government is so hooked on gambling that they've incorporated this gaming option into their crop insurance program.

We continually hear from that government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in agriculture, particularly in the grain and oilseeds sector, that it's the federal government's responsibility; that the problems in agriculture dealing with farm subsidies and those sorts of things, the provincial government can't step up to the plate because they simply don't have the financial resources.

And we do agree with some of that, but not entirely everything. Because there are things that this government can do — this provincial government can do. They can help keep down

farmers' costs. And by removing spot loss hail and increasing the premium rates in crop insurance, they're doing anything but.

And why are they doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well I'll tell you why they're doing that. Because they found themselves, due to their mismanagement of this economy over the last 10, 11 years, they found themselves in a difficult financial situation so they sat down and they said, look we've got to save some money somewhere. So where are we going to save it; well where are we going to pull the money out of? Well we may as well pull it out of rural Saskatchewan because those people didn't vote for us in the last election; they're not going to vote for them in the next election. And with these recent changes in crop insurance and education tax and some of these other things, they won't be voting for them in the next five elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition members were heckling their own speaker so bad that it was very hard to follow the reasoning, but judging from the hand motions, I'm sure that actions may or may not speak louder than words.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this debate is about more than just about the crop insurance program in Saskatchewan. And to understand the reasons for changes to crop insurance and the choices that were made in the design . . . in the program design, you must first understand the way in which safety net programs are funded and the policy direction of the federal government.

Since the late 1980s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the early 1990s, the federal government have been very clear on two fronts. First, they've certainly gone down the road of reducing federal spending in support of the agricultural industry, and they have been asking the provinces and the producers to pick up a larger share of the costs.

In the 1980s, the federal government took the major responsibility for protecting farmers against production risk and price risk. Crop insurance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was funded 50 per cent by the federal government, 50 per cent by producers, and the province paid for the administration.

Under the Western Grain Stabilization Act, the federal government funded two-thirds of the costs, with producers funding one-third of the cost. The federal government also took the responsibility for addressing low grain prices across Canada in 1986 and in 1987 by providing over \$1 billion each year for the special grains programs, one and number two. In addition, the farmers had the Crow benefit which was funded solely by the federal government.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the federal government started to off-load the cost of safety net programs onto the provinces. They required provinces to pay 25 per cent of the cost of the 1988 drought program. Cost sharing in crop insurance was changed in 1991, requiring provinces to equally cost share the government's portion of the program costs on a 50/50 basis.

Under safety net programs of the early 1990s, producers paid thirty-three and a third per cent of the costs; provinces paid twenty-five per cent of the costs; while the federal government

continued to pay the majority of the cost, covering forty-two and two-thirds per cent.

Under NISA, producers were required to pay 50 per cent of the cost, while the federal government and the provinces each paid 25 per cent of the costs. The federal government continued to provide the Crow benefit and they provided additional assistance through the farm support and adjustment measures program which was again fully federally funded.

So you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's been quite a shift in the onus of who pays for the programs and it certainly has gone from heavily federally funded to a great deal of the burden being borne by the provinces and, indeed, a portion being borne by the producers.

(15:30)

Now by the time the 1990s rolled around, the federal government, armed with the World Trade Organization agreement, went about reducing support for Canadian farmers, primarily the Western Canadian grains and oilseed producers. They did this under the naive assumption that the WTO (World Trade Organization) agreement would result in other countries reducing the amount of trade distorting support provided to their agricultural industry.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the federal government ended the Crow subsidy. And I can remember as a New Democrat in the '80s wearing a hat that said Keep the Crow, let Nelson . . . or what was his name? Let him go, anyway. And a lot of producers, I must say — a lot of producers, I must say, were quite happy to take the money and run. And the whole of the province is suffering from that decision to end the Crow subsidy.

In addition, the federal government reduced the federal safety net envelope to \$600 million across Canada and they required provinces to start paying 40 per cent of the overall safety net programming costs. Yes, the federal government decided to unilaterally disarm and, of course, it turns out that they were wrong in their assumption that other countries would follow suit.

As we all know, the European Union and the United States continued to provide a large amount of trade distorting subsidies to their sector. So following the last WTO negotiations, Canada reduced its support to Canadian wheat producers by 62 per cent, while the EU (European Union) has reduced their historically very high levels by only 17 per cent and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the US (United States) continues to provide the same level of support to their wheat producers as they did in the 1980s.

So today in the US, 49 cents out of every dollar of a farmer's wheat sale comes from government subsidies. In the EU that number is 43 cents and in Canada it's only 17 cents.

Clearly, Canada grains and oilseed producers and in particular Western Canadian grains and oilseed producers have felt the brunt of the federal government's policy changes around the funding of agriculture support programs. As a result our producers, who as the member from Regina Northeast has said

are some of the most competitive and efficient producers in the world, are forced to compete with the treasuries of the EU and the United States.

The provincial government has been very active in trying to convince the federal government to reverse the harmful policy decisions and take actions to help our producers level the international playing field.

Minister Serby made presentations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture on this issue last summer and again this February when the committee was touring Saskatchewan.

Last fall, Premier Calvert . . . I beg your pardon, the Minister of Agriculture. And last fall the Premier prepared a report to all the other premiers entitled *A Fair Deal For Canadian Farmers*. And that was discussed and they attempted to negotiate an end to the trade distorting subsidies. But to no avail as yet, and still we're waiting for solutions through the WTO.

At the January federal, provincial, and territorial agricultural meeting, the Minister of Agriculture put forward Saskatchewan's proposal for future safety net programming in a paper entitled *An Option For Future Agricultural Safety Net Programming Within the Agricultural Policy Framework* — and that's a dreadfully long title.

But this paper builds on the background work prepared by the Premier, by our own provincial Farm Support Review Committee, which recently completed an extensive consultation and a review of safety net programs in this province. It was endorsed by a group of farm leaders who view it as a feasible option to address safety net needs.

And I think that we may have been somewhat alone in our . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no representation from the opposition on that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . invisible indeed.

So I believe that the Saskatchewan proposal is a three-pronged approach to responding to producers' risk management. I believe that this proposal will go a long way in meeting the risk management needs, not only of Saskatchewan producers but of Canadian producers. We will continue to pursue this proposal very vigorously with the federal government and other provinces as we work towards a new federal/provincial safety net.

But in order for any of these to work, we have to have . . . we have to have some changes. We have to address the so-called Fredericton formula which resulted in the funding being distributed to provinces based on the size of industry rather than the size of the province and the people involved in the industry and the ability of the province to pay based on the number of taxpayers that it has.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just getting back to the crop . . . I just wanted to make this point, that this is of interest to everybody in Saskatchewan because as a result of the federal requirement for funding, the 40 per cent portion, Saskatchewan taxpayers are providing support to the agricultural industry to the tune of \$439 for every man, woman, and child in this province.

Meanwhile in Ontario they put in about \$37 per capita and the federal government is providing \$88 in support.

So you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is much work to be done. Our Minister of Agriculture is doing very good work and I don't know why the opposition won't get on the bandwagon and endorse the work that the provincial government is doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think all of us regret the rural/urban split we see in this province. I think all of us understand that the prosperity and health of this province requires that both city and country move forward together.

Unfortunately I think the commitment of this government to rural Saskatchewan has taken a significant downturn since the change in leadership in February of 1999. I remember when former Deputy Premier Dwain Lingenfelter fought for the inclusion of the 25 per cent rebate on education tax on farmland. And of course he faced some opposition but he got it through at that time.

Now he's gone and the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) is still with us who thought that her back alley is more important than highways to the small communities of this province. So we now know that the commitment to rural Saskatchewan that used to be there has simply now completely gone and I think that's shown in crop insurance rates here.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The member's time has expired. There will now be a brief 10-minute period for question and comments.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been interesting . . . Deputy Speaker . . . it's been interesting over the last week or so as we meet in caucus and some of us are bringing our crop insurance program outlines to caucus and talking about the program and the lack of crop insurance or the lack of hail coverage.

But we're also talking a little bit about some of the variances that we see in our coverage, in particular between summerfallow and stubble. And I've talked on it different times in the House here why there is such a discrepancy between summerfallow and stubble. I'd be very interested to ask the member from Idylwyld or the member from Meewasin, whichever would choose to answer, when your government promotes zero till, the Soil Conservation Association promotes zero tillage, I think most every member on this side of the House would promote zero tillage — but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the coverages, crop insurance hasn't taken that into consideration.

One quick example is flax coverage on land that I happen to own — 18.5 bushel an acre on summerfallow, 14 bushel on stubble. Are you promoting zero till or . . .

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

Mr. Forbes: — I really appreciate this question here because you know what used to drive me crazy when I was a teacher —

just up until last October — was the odd teacher who thought only teachers know about education. Only teachers know about education. Parents don't know anything about education; citizens on the street don't know anything about education. But the vast majority of teachers would know that we're all partners in making education work.

And just like in this issue here, I don't know an awful lot about zero tillage. My brother would. I know a little bit about summerfallow and stubble and I understood . . . I heard a heckle about picking stones — we used to call it picking rock. So I have a little bit of experience, but I understand in Saskatchewan how important this is and how important it is that we're all together on this issue.

And I'm really surprised at how the opposition just won't get inside and talk to the federal people with us about this very, very important issue. And zero tillage is a detail. Let's talk about the federal government and the big picture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to ask the member from Watrous the following question. And it's clear and very evident that this government has for a long, long time been urging the federal government to step to the plate with a meaningful support mechanism that would cushion the impact that the unfair subsidies the United States and European Common Markets are having on our farm producers — in many cases as much as \$1 a bushel. And most other provinces have supported this position.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to ask the member, when will you stand up for Saskatchewan . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. All comments to the Chair and through the Chair.

Mr. Harper: — I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you to the member from Watrous, when will she stand up and support Saskatchewan farmers and Saskatchewan farm families and stop supporting the Americans and the European governments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite honoured to be able to answer that question. I don't believe that any member on this side of the House has ever said that there isn't a federal government responsibility for the producers of this province. But however we've also pointed out that in the past 10 years that this province has cut back on the support for absolutely every program that was available to the producers of this province.

They have promised time and time and time again that they're going to negotiate with the federal government until they bring money back to Saskatchewan, with absolutely no results. So it's kind of interesting. If they're not willing to support their own farmers, then how do they negotiate with the federal government to do the same?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the hon. member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

I want to know whether the increased crop insurance rates, the abolition of the 25 per cent education tax rebate on farmland, and the threatening to arrest the mayors of small communities who don't have the funds to fix their water treatment plants, if this is part of a rural revenge strategy because they didn't vote NDP; if this is a part of a strategy to make sure that public funds are only spent in those seats which might possibly return a New Democratic candidate. Is this a rural revenge strategy we are seeing unfolding here?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And thank you to the member for the question.

I want to say that as a government we are investing all across Saskatchewan. There is absolutely no sense of rural revenge. And believe me, if there were, I'd be wreaking revenge on my own relatives who are involved in the farm community. And I myself am only one generation removed from the farm.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are investing in highways, we are investing in water infrastructure, we are investing in agriculture, and we are investing in the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a question for the member from Watrous.

Last June the federal and provincial governments announced a plan for a national agriculture policy, the first time ever that all provinces and the federal government have moved in this direction. The Saskatchewan government initiated an extensive consultation process through the Farm Support Review Committee. This process resulted in our proposal to the national table, a proposal that meets the needs of our producers.

Why didn't the Saskatchewan Party feel the need to make a presentation to this group, the Farm Support Review Committee? Where were you? Where were the party?

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. That question is out of order because it's not related to any member on this side's speech. So that question is out of order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is to the member from Saskatoon Meewasin. That member in her speech said that all the problems associated with Saskatchewan agriculture are the federal government's fault. They did away with the Crow rate, they cut back on funding, and all those . . . that long list of sob stories. I wonder how she justifies increasing farmers' input costs by up to 200 per cent, removing a education rebate . . . or tax rebate from the farm program. How is that supporting Saskatchewan farmers?

(15:45)

The Deputy Speaker: — Would the member please repeat the question.

Mr. Hart: — My question is to the member from Saskatoon Meewasin. That member indicated in her speech that it seems all the problems associated with Saskatchewan agriculture are the federal government's fault — they did away with the Crow rate; they supposedly cut back funding according to that member.

Yet what does her provincial government do? They increase farmers' input costs by the range of \$200 . . . 200 per cent. They've removed a rebate on property tax. How is that supporting Saskatchewan farmers?

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank the member for his question. I'm getting more exposure in the agricultural community than he is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we provide a lot . . . We provide 5 per cent of our provincial budget to support agriculture in this province. We are investing in agriculture all across this province. We lead the nation in investment in agriculture of any provincial . . . We lead the nation in investment in agriculture of any province in this country.

As I said in my remarks, we invest \$439 per capita for every man, woman, and child in this province. No other province does. We're proud of our investment in agriculture. We're proud of the industry. And I'm proud of our government's record.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the member from Watrous. Last year the federal and provincial governments did an extensive development of a program, a national program, that would include in crop insurance and other safety net programs for agriculture. And the Saskatchewan government did an extensive consultation process through the Farm Support Review Committee.

My question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the member from Watrous is: why didn't the Sask Party feel the need to make a presentation to the Farm Support Review Committee on the need to enhance our safety net programs such as crop insurance?

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the member for the question.

It's amazing how they keep on saying what would you do, what would you do. And then the member across the floor says, why did you present what you're going to do, why did you . . . why did you make a presentation of what you're going to do?

I'll tell you what. If he wants to know everything we're going to do, call an election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Seventy-five minute debate has

expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 3 — Long-Term Care Home Fees

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and members, it's a great pleasure to rise today to talk about an issue that I think is of fundamental importance to the people of this province and indicates very clearly the lack of direction and the desperation of this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, what we are going to propose today in our motion is the following:

That this Assembly call on the provincial government to reconsider its decision to address its own fiscal problems on the backs of the sick and the elderly by significantly increasing long-term care home fees.

Mr. Speaker, when I first got word of the fact that this might be being considered by the government by a bit of information that came prior to the budget, I actually had to question the fact that this might indeed be real or not because it seemed to me absolutely unbelievable that this government, or any government in this province, would attempt to download its fiscal mess on the backs of people who can be least able to afford it.

Mr. Speaker, when we heard that the government was considering this, we asked the minister some questions and said, is it true that you're going to consider downloading your fiscal mess on the backs of the ill and the elderly by dramatically increasing long-term care rates? And the minister said, well you're going to have to wait for the budget.

Well we waited for the budget and our worse suspicions came true. The government not only proposed significant increases, they proposed increases to long-term care fees in a dramatic fashion, in a much greater amount than what anybody would have comprehended that any government would have done anywhere in this country.

Mr. Speaker, it speaks to the desperation of this government to try to milk any source that they possibly can for additional revenues and in doing so, they lose track of the fundamental principles and the fundamental values that this province was founded on by turning against the very people that were the pioneers and built this country for all of us to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, it was almost beyond belief when you saw what the magnitude of the difficulties were going to be.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, and then the government sort of says that this is okay, don't worry about it because all we're doing is we're affecting the fees for 120 rich people in this province. Well most people are surprised to understand that after 10 years of this government there are even 120 rich people left in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — And they certainly, and they certainly have no incentive in this province to be able to get yourself in a position of some financial security when you reach your old age because now the members opposite are quite gleeful about reaching into your savings and reaching into the rewards of your lifetime of toil and say, now that we've got you in the most vulnerable time of your whole life, we're going to take advantage of that in order to raise a grand total of \$7.4 million in a \$2.3 billion health care budget.

Mr. Speaker, how can this be possibly even considered, never mind believed that it's being considered? Well, they did. And then they go around gleefully saying, well what are you complaining about; we're only talking about rich people after all.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about anybody in this Assembly or anybody in this province that are potentially listening to the debate this afternoon that realize who we're talking about — that the very people that built our province and our country are the people that we're talking about.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to certainly say that all of us have very, very clear memories of grandparents, and of mothers and dads, and people that went before us — uncles and aunts — and there's a lot of anecdotal stories about how important they were and how importantly they believed that they should prepare themselves as best as possible for the future.

Mr. Speaker, we're in the year 2002 and people that generally require long-term care probably are at least of retirement age or older. So these people are the people that have come to this country or were born somewhere before the First World War. And when they came to this country they might have been there before with their parents before them as pioneers, and they grew up in very, by and large, very austere surroundings.

They were the pioneers in the country. They were born to families who either came here for the first time as immigrants or they were born to families who established here early.

But they were difficult times for Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan people. They were the times of the '30s when agriculture was very difficult, when we had year after year of drought and winds and dust storms similar to what we have now. And instead of turning against the people that needed the help the most at that time as this government is doing now in the face of the drought and the face of the needs of our long-term care and our senior citizens, people back then banded together and made the best of their circumstances and made sure that what was going on was going to be sustainable for them and for their families into the future.

And Saskatchewan people and our pioneers and our forefathers and mothers built a very strong family ethic. They believed if you stuck together and you helped each other and you looked after your family and you were responsible about the resources and opportunities you had, that one day when you got older you were not going to be as dependent upon your family, as many people of that generation had their parents dependent on them because of the circumstance of the time.

People understood that there was a fundamental family societal

value that needed to be maintained in order to build a proper society — is that we looked after the generation that went before us. We had not only a personal and family but a social and societal obligation to make sure that we were going to provide for the pioneers that have gone before us.

And over the generations things changed as to how that was happening. I remember when my grandparents — and when I was a young fellow and went to my grandparents' house — they had very often their own parents living with them because there were no long-term care facilities, there were no institutions whereby people could be looked after. I remember my grandmother and grandfather also had an invalid son, who was my uncle, who was crippled because of a medical incident that happened at his birth. And they didn't put Uncle Alvin in an institution, they looked after him at home.

They had that fundamental value and belief that there was a responsibility for people to look after each other. And, Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in this Assembly and everyone listening today potentially, can recount stories of how our grandparents and the people that went before us took for granted the fundamental responsibility that we had to each other in terms of caring for the generation that went before, or for brothers or sisters that had difficulties that needed special care.

People gathered together and they provided the support that was needed. And there was no organized institutions that did this, by and large. It was simply out of the goodwill and the good intentions of people working together.

Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of fundamental attitude about caring for each other, and caring for the generation that went before us, that I think Canada, and Saskatchewan in particular as a prairie province, can be particularly proud of.

It's a history that something is cared about and protected and held to be precious that sets us in many ways apart from a lot of other societies and civilizations that have gone before. And as we become a modern society, that fundamental underpinning of the way we built our communities certainly was something that we all thought about and cared about.

And, Mr. Speaker, certainly I would like to believe that those fundamental values are values that we carry forward in the 21st century, and somehow we haven't forgot about and left somewhere behind in the archives of history. Because I don't think it's appropriate, and I don't think that Saskatchewan people are like that fundamentally.

And so, Mr. Speaker, that's why I was so fundamentally shocked and surprised when I heard that this government was considering moving up long-term care fees in such a dramatic and significant way that was going to be a problem, not only for some people, but for an awful lot of people in circumstances other than the . . . what the NDP idealized as saying oh, it's only going to affect 120 rich people, and implying that it really doesn't matter anyway. Because one of the fundamental things about the NDP is if they look at anybody that's worked hard and achieved anything in their life, they want to make sure they do everything to bring him down to the lowest common denominator, rather than bringing other people up to aspire to doing the best they can.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I want to point to particularly in this whole issue is there's a fundamental attitudinal problem by this government. Because that they think that it's okay just to look around and say, who can we sock it to today in terms of finding the money, finding the resources to overcome some of the very, very bad decisions we've made in the past?

There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that this province is facing a real crisis, and a crossroads. And why would you not face that kind of a crisis after 10 years of NDP government?

The NDP can sit over there and chirp from their seats; the member for Moose Jaw sits there quite gleefully, with a big smile on his face, talking about all the significant, wonderful accomplishments of this government. He talks with pride about the fact that they don't mind blowing \$28 million on SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), and he will stand up and vote for a budget that'll take \$7 million out of the pockets of our seniors in this province and he thinks this is good government.

(16:00)

Well, Mr. Speaker, it isn't good government. It isn't proper, it isn't ethical, and it certainly doesn't reflect the values of Saskatchewan people who say our seniors and the rewards of their hard toil over a lifetime should at least be respected and not used as some kind of a tax grab in order to balance a budget that is created because of the . . . (inaudible) . . . of that NDP government.

And I'll invite any one of those members to stand in their place later on today or this evening, and get into this debate and explain how they think it's so wonderful that we are going to take, as a legislature, the fundamental decision to rob the piggy banks and the savings accounts of our seniors in order to make up for the misguided adventures of this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, it simply is not appropriate. It simply is not fair. It's unacceptable, and certainly it was a fundamental reason in this last budget debate why I couldn't even consider considering supporting that budget that was going to treat our citizens in such a shabby way. And particularly the people most vulnerable — the ill and the elderly — who have to depend on us now in their moment of need for the support that we as a province and a society should be providing.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP are quite happy to talk about the fact that this only affects a very few people who have lots of money. Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't affect just a very few people; I think they quoted 120 rich folks. Mr. Speaker, it affects virtually everyone that is needing long-term care.

Because what the government has done is they have said that we're not just going to sock it to this 120 people who have a few bucks saved up. We're going to virtually change the whole funding formula for how long-term care rates are applied.

And so, Mr. Speaker, for anyone that makes more than 900-odd dollars, it's going to affect them in some way. And it's true that if you only make a little bit more than the \$900, the effect is more minimal. If your monthly income is \$1,000 a month, your new fees are only going to be \$2.40 more than they were before

— a very modest increase for sure. But what they've done is said look, at anything over this 900-odd dollars that you make, where we used to take 50 per cent of the money that you made over that amount and left you with 50 per cent for lots of other things that you have to spend — you have to provide for your own prescription drugs, and they've done away with the cap on that as well or raised it significantly. You have to provide for other miscellaneous services that you're going to require in the long-term care home and many of those fees are 20 to \$50 a month. People quite routinely say that they have 100 to \$200 a month in prescription drug expenses. All of these things are potentially added on.

And so, Mr. Speaker, indeed at the bottom end you're not going to pay that much more. But you know what, Mr. Speaker, there's all kinds of seniors in this province who are paying that minimal amount who do not have very much money left after that now. They are not sitting there with whole bunches of money going into their savings account because there are demands on those monies that they have left.

If you're on the minimum pension, you don't have an awful lot of money left over after you pay the \$833 that you need for your long-term care fees and these other auxiliary services.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we have a group of people even starting at the very minimum of the fee schedule who are sitting there saying we don't have very much money as it is, and they are sitting here being very gleeful about the fact that they are only increasing their fees by \$2.40.

But, Mr. Speaker, what are these people left with, these seniors even at the minimum of the scale? I mean, what senior citizen is not also probably, in vast majorities, also a grandmother or grandfather? What senior citizen being a grandma or grandpa doesn't want at Christmastime to have a present under the tree for their grandchildren? What grandparent would not want to have a few dollars on a grandchild's birthday or their own son's or daughter's birthday? What senior citizen wouldn't love that when the grandkids come and visit there's some money to buy a bag of candies or some treats for the grandkids?

There are issues that speak to the humanity of people and who they are, and you simply can't look at it as a credit or a debit on a ledger sheet and say, oh there's some more money we can get from these people.

Mr. Speaker, it is very clear to me that this government has been so desperate to make up for the shortfalls of their wild adventures in Australia and New Zealand and United States and all over the world, Mr. Speaker, they are so desperate for making up for those mistakes that they'll turn to anything and anyone in order to try to grab some extra revenue to balance their so-called budget.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when the argument is, is this doesn't affect people at the bottom end of the scale, it's simply not fair to say that, because so many people, so many people have other demands on their very modest income. And, Mr. Speaker, what the government is doing is saying, if you've got anything over that very minimal amount, we're going to make sure that we get our hands into your pocket.

Mr. Speaker, what this government did is not just the 120 rich people. What they did is they changed the formula for everyone over that 900-odd dollars. And they said to these people, lookit, what we're going to do in the past, we took the basic amount and we're going to take half of everything you have above that to a \$1,541 cap limit.

And, Mr. Speaker, I remember the associated deputy minister about three years ago announced pretty significant increases in those amounts even, two or three years ago. Nothing related to inflation. Nothing related to what would be fair or reasonable. But significant increases that have gone forward two or three years ago.

And, Mr. Speaker, what they did is they said, we're not going to leave you with 50 per cent of the money you have left to that capped amount. That wasn't good enough. It wasn't enough to say that we'll leave you with 50 per cent of the money so you could buy a few presents for your grandchildren, so that you could buy a few presents on their birthdays or at Christmas, or you could help out with the family and have a little bit of pride in being a grandma or grandpa, and that you would have that independence and the satisfaction of being able to do those sorts of things.

No, this group of people weren't satisfied with leaving you with 50 per cent. They said, we're going to take 90 per cent. We're going to leave you with 10 per cent — 10 cents on the dollar is what they said we're going to leave you — to make sure . . . what we're going to do is make sure that you have absolutely no pride and independence left. We're going to make sure we take it all.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting in this debate because I'll be willing to venture that members opposite, instead of getting up and debating this issue tonight and having their turn to speak, the member from Regina South — who chirps from his seat and says, well what's the big deal? — I hope that they'll enter into the debate instead of adjourning it so that the discussion can't happen.

And I challenge them to stay here tonight and debate this issue and tell us why they can justify this atrocious Act and attack on our seniors. And I hope they'll stay on this topic tonight and debate it till 10:30 tonight, because the people want to hear what these guys are going to say.

I hope that happens, Mr. Speaker, but I'll bet that there's going to be an adjournment soon as it gets the chance. Because they don't want to talk about this. How in the world can they talk about it and justify this assault on the seniors of this province?

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a fundamental attack on seniors of this province by attacking their right to have reasonable access to long-term care at fees that are not going to take every cent that they've made and earned and saved over the generation of working in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I know exactly what's going to happen . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member says, from the back says . . . and he says that they're taking every bit of disposable income. The member says, oh we're not touching the money that they've got in their bank account; they're only talking of

the returns on this investment.

Well where do you think this money goes? It goes to the people's expenses and to their families. They worked for this money and the NDP think that it's their money. Well it's not. It's the money that was earned by the people of this province who forewent holidays and days off and other discretionary expenditures and tried to provide for their long-term care needs over time.

Mr. Speaker, that's the problem. The member yells from his seat and says, why should the taxpayers subsidize the rich?

The Speaker: — Order, please. Just . . . Order, please. Order. All members will have their opportunity. Right now I request members to give the attention to the member from Melfort-Tisdale.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the member is heckling from the other side. The member from Regina Qu'Appelle says, well, what's wrong with taking the money from the rich? Well, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the attitude of this NDP government.

This NDP government would rather turn to people who have worked hard and saved money and built up a little bit of an equity, and use those money to try to pay for the misadventures that they have created. Mr. Speaker, they sit there and they've got this great attitude about who these rich folks are. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, members. Order. Now the occasional heckle is quite welcome but this sort of insistent hollering is unwelcome.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know the members opposite seem to be quite gleeful about the position that they've taken, is that what we're going to do is we're going to sock it to the rich.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you something. It isn't going to be something they can do very long because with their attitude, there won't be any rich people left in this province. There's darn few of them now. We're talking about, by their own admission, they're saying 120 people is all this is going to affect.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it affects a lot more people than that because the whole system doesn't start at the \$3,800 that they're talking about. The system starts at anything over 900-odd dollars. And so people that are currently paying \$900, they're going to have their fees go up \$82 a month. Well certainly I would hope that someone making \$1,200 a month . . . Is that their definition of rich? Is that what they're talking about? Or someone making \$1,800 a month is now going to go up by \$322 a month. Is that their definition of rich? Someone that is making \$2,000 is going to have their fees go up by \$400 a month. Is that the rich people of this province?

Well, Mr. Speaker, these aren't rich people. They're our mothers and fathers and people who have went before us, and they may not realize it but it's also their mothers and fathers, Mr. Speaker, who are going to have every dime picked from

their pockets.

This is what's inherently fair . . . unfair about this situation, Mr. Speaker, is the attitude of the members opposite, of this NDP government, who seem to be quite delighted to say, we got \$80 million for a telco in Australia — no big deal — and yet they want to claw \$7 million out of the long-term care residents of Saskatchewan. How can you square that, Mr. Speaker?

They have lost more in the SPUDCO gamble than it would cost to make up this difference over four years for the senior citizens.

And they sit there and the minister for CIC says . . . Well I think there's been a couple of quotes. This was less than an acceptable return, was one of them. But he also said it was a success. Well how can you possibly measure that as a success as compared to what they're doing to our senior citizens today, Mr. Speaker? It's unconscionable and it's not right.

Mr. Speaker, we have said in this province, and the statistics bear it out, that we're losing all kinds of our people. And we've lamented by the fact that we're losing people at the beginning of their career and young people who should be staying to make a livelihood and a future here.

But, Mr. Speaker, with the attitude of this government, we're also going to lose our senior citizens — because they're not foolish; they can go anywhere in this country to retire. They don't have to also stay here. And these so-called rich seniors that this government categorizes as a significant portion of the total, they can leave as well. And, Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't they?

(16:15)

You know, I had a look on the Internet. I had a look on the Internet and effective of November of 2001, the rates, the maximum rate — let's forget about the minimum rates. But in British Columbia, the maximum rate was \$1,500 a month. Well that was sort of in keeping with what Saskatchewan's rate was prior to this outrageous tax grab, about \$1,500 a month. In Alberta, where it's just the worst part of the world, in the Internet it said that the maximum rate was \$991 a month for a private room. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not a bad deal in our neighbour to one side. In Manitoba, on the other side, the maximum rate — the maximum rate was \$1,806 a month. Hardly anything in comparison to the \$3,875 that these tax grabbing NDP government individuals are considering.

And so why wouldn't people move? They don't have to go far. People living in Yorkton can go to Brandon. People living in Lloydminster just have to cross the border. People in Saskatoon can go to Red Deer. People in Calgary can go to Medicine Hat. You know, why wouldn't you leave? Why would you stay here? Because in a way, if you're going to get it socked to you about the long-term care rates, you might as well go to Alberta where your children are probably anyway, Mr. Speaker.

So these people, this government sits there and crassly sort of looks at this and crassly looks at it, Mr. Speaker, and says it don't matter, all is we affect is a few rich people. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, it doesn't just affect rich people. It affects

ordinary people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — People who have saved their money for a long time.

Mr. Speaker, you know, you can look at different kinds of instances and everybody assumes that all that this affects is seniors. It affects anybody who requires a long-term care facility. It could be a relatively young person who has had debilitating strokes or has had a trauma like a car accident that have left them incapacitated.

They might have some savings. But they might also and quite often do, do not enter a long-term care facility as a couple. And so quite often, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where a husband or a wife require the services of a long-term care facility and the other one has to live and try to make sure that they can meet the needs of a house and household expenses and all the rest of it out of these shared expenses.

And the government does have a formula whereby you can split the income and that's certainly better than what the alternative is. But there are sometimes very severe demands on a family to have one of the partners in the situation being placed in a long-term care home.

Mr. Speaker, this doesn't just affect 130 rich people. It affects lots of people in Saskatchewan and it also speaks to the rest of us who thankfully are not ready for a long-term care home yet. Because what it says to the rest of this province, Mr. Speaker, is we don't value the sweat of your labour; we're going to take it from you when we've got you in a position to do that.

There's no sense in you saving your money; there's no sense in you being frugal. There's no sense in trying to be responsible about the long-term needs that you're going to require, because if you accumulate any money we're going to make sure we bring you down to the lowest common denominator, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — That's what we're going to do to you — that's the message to people in Saskatchewan and it's a wrong message, Mr. Speaker. This decision must be reversed.

Mr. Speaker, as much as I am reluctant to quote Murray Mandryk — and I know the members opposite are also shuddering at the thought that I might do that — every now and again he actually understands some of the fundamentals about what's going on. And, Mr. Speaker, he quotes in an article of Friday, April 5, a headline that says: "Boosting nursing home fees just doesn't seem to be fair."

Well Murray's right, Murray's absolutely right. And he goes on to quote an individual who is an 84-year-old retired Canadian Air Force metal workshop superintendent who has been working on the whole issue surrounding seniors. And this individual's name is Frank Draper. And it says that prior to his 26-year military career ending in 1966 he helped found Moose Jaw air base's credit union. He managed it for 10 years and it

accumulated about \$1.5 million in assets before merging with Moose Jaw's credit union.

So Mr. Draper is a very community-minded, very frugal kind of an individual. And then he worked . . . It says in this article by Murray, his 36-year status as a retiree would give him a little bit of experience about the issues facing retirees. And he said that he can't understand how the NDP government can consider what they're doing is anything fair at all.

And he also notes something very interesting in this whole cash grab by the NDP. He says, you know what? He said in this whole package there is nothing in it, and I quote:

First, Draper notes that the new policy doesn't provide any help (at all) to the low-income seniors in nursing homes who will still be paying the . . . \$1,581 a month charge that some of them can barely afford.

And it's right because when you add up all of these other costs, there is precious little left over for these people, as I've indicated earlier.

And, Mr. Speaker, most of us in the Assembly of a certain age are now young grandparents, very young grandparents. And most of us in this Assembly who have the pleasure and the blessing of that status, one of the great joys we have is to be able to buy things for our grandkids, to treat them on their birthday and at Christmas. And, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to take all the money that any of us accumulate in terms of our cash flow, how are we going to continue to do that?

And this government seems determined to do that and it's wrong.

Mr. Speaker, Murray also goes on to say, and I want to quote:

There's just something a little unsettling about gouging the life-savings of people who lived through two world wars and a Depression in the name of a measly extra \$7 million — about one per cent of the provincial government's annual expenditures.

And you know what the NDP says? Oh it's just these rich guys; it sort of don't matter. But they also say that if you got a few bucks, you got the option about going into the private care system. Well, Mr. Speaker, for some people that's maybe true.

But you know there are 261 private nursing care facilities in this province and most of them do their very best to provide the services people need. But they only can provide services to a certain level of care. They provide services that more are for people that are much more independent than the people who are required to go into permanent long-term care homes.

The way this has gone over the last decade — and I'm not arguing with the fundamental principle of it — that the people that go into long-term care are heavy care . . . people that need heavy care. They can't live with a great deal of independence and they can't work in a private care home. The level of service simply is not appropriate to their needs.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the people that are going into these homes

require that heavy care, and they simply are at a stage of their health and their age that they don't have the option of a private home that might provide them with facilities.

And so the argument that's made is not one that makes any sense at all, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is simply a wrong, wrong idea and a wrong policy about this government.

And, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite say, well what are we going to do? What are we going to do? Well it's obviously that they have no ideas in terms of what to do. What they turn to is saying okay, let's find these few rich people — as they define it — people left, and say to them, here we're going to charge you as much as we possibly can to wring 90 per cent of the income out of you to make sure that we got every cent from you and we can bring you down to the lowest common denominator.

I had a call from an individual who said, you know, right now, right now, I'm a retired teacher and my wife is a retired teacher; she had a stroke so she wasn't able to get the benefit of a full teacher's pension.

And, Mr. Speaker, I mean, there's all kinds of retired teachers in this province and you and I both know that they don't make a huge amount of money in their retirement. This isn't exorbitant amounts of money, these so-called rich people.

But this individual said to me, you know what, Rod, I went and I put aside money all my life for my old age; I made sure that when I had a few extra dollars, I thought about the time in our retirement when we were going to require long-term care and we're going to require some extra money in terms of being able to have money to support ourselves in our old age and be able to give a few dollars for our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren.

And he said, what was the incentive? Because right now, as a couple of two, his wife needs to go into a long-term care home. And he said, right now we qualify as being so-called rich people. But he said, in order to do that, I'm going to have to live independently at home and soon our savings and our assets are going to be slowly and surely and relentlessly depleted so by the time both of us are in the institution, we will quickly no longer be rich people, we will be people near the minimum of the income grid.

And so they've taken people who have saved and were frugal and responsible for an entire lifetime and they've brought them down successfully to the lowest common denominator which is this government's objective for all of us in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, it simply will not do. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about what we have to do in this province, and the members opposite chirp from their seat and say, what would you do? Well I'll say what we'd do officially and for the record right now. A Sask Party government would roll back these exorbitant fees to the amount that was there prior to this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — And, Mr. Speaker, that's not a big wild-eyed promise, it's one that we can and will make. And we'll make it as a promise to the people of this province that are going to be gouged for the next year, until such time as that government hoists up the courage to face the people on their record for their priorities and their expenditures.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — And they will have to go before the people of this promise and explain why they should have been in Guyana, why they should have been in Australia, why they were in Georgia, why they were in New Zealand, why they were wasting money on SPUDCO. They will have to go explain not only to the seniors of this province, but to all of the people about what their priorities have been and how they've squandered opportunities.

And instead of dealing with those issues, they decided to turn to the most vulnerable and . . . pioneers in our province that we are going to say, as the Saskatchewan Party, we respect and will protect, and we will roll back this exorbitant fee increase prior to this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — At least then, Mr. Speaker, once again Saskatchewan will have a set of fees that is comparable to our neighbouring provinces.

Why in the world is this government determined to give us the worst record in almost every field. We're sitting here between two provinces and our long-term care fees are more than double what they are in our neighbouring provinces. How is that seem fair or reasonable? It just isn't, Mr. Speaker; it isn't fair and reasonable. And this government is going to have to stand for that decision. Mr. Speaker, it simply is not right.

Mr. Speaker, when we all talk and look about what are the appropriate ways that we should go in this province, we simply have to make sure that rather than trying to find sources of revenue by clawing back the last bits of nickels and dimes from our seniors and for people on things like prescription drug plans, we simply make alternative choices.

The members opposite ask what would we do? Well I've said what we'd do, Mr. Speaker. But more fundamentally, if you're going to provide for the services that our citizens require in long-term care, and in health care, and in essential services we need, we simply need to grow this economy, Mr. Speaker.

We can't sit here and continue to manage a decline; we've got to aspire to excellence. We've got to aspire to growth. We have to aspire to the ability to make sure we're doing a good job and providing for our seniors and our citizens in an appropriate way.

Mr. Speaker, this is not something new. It's not something that you could call evolutionary or revolutionary rocket science. It's something that speaks to the fundamental values of our province and our country and our citizens. And it goes back to what I said when I started, Mr. Speaker — think about who we were and where we've come from.

People looked after each other; they cared about one another; and when they were in a situation of need, we didn't turn on them and pick their pockets. We said, how can we reasonably provide these services in a fair and a responsible way and leave you with a bit of your dignity and your independence that people need.

(16:30)

Mr. Speaker, it amazes me that the members opposite will chirp from their seat and say that this isn't a good idea.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly am going to be most interested to hear for the rest of the day and this evening about what the members opposite are going to say about this issue. And I certainly hope that when the members opposite get their turn, they're not going to stand in their place and adjourn the debate. Because there's a majority of them over there and they certainly can make sure that they bull that through. We can vote against it and it doesn't matter because there's a majority of members opposite.

And, Mr. Speaker, we know that if that happens, we're going to end up with a situation that they're going to take the opportunity to adjourn this debate rather than talk about it. That's what I think. I hope I'm wrong. I hope that the members opposite will allow this very debate to continue till 10:30 at adjournment tonight, uninterrupted, and let members on both sides of this House engage in this debate.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that I allow time for people to engage in this debate and I certainly challenge them not to take advantage of their first opportunity to speak, to adjourn it. And if they'll do that, I think people in this province will see where these people are at and it'll be a good exercise, Mr. Speaker.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put forward a motion, seconded by my colleague, the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy:

That this Assembly call on the provincial government to reconsider its decision (to reconsider its decision) to address its own fiscal problems on the backs of the sick and the elderly by significantly increasing long-term care home fees.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today and am very proud to second the motion put forward by the member from Melfort-Tisdale.

It is time that the NDP quit making the sick and elderly pay for their own fiscal mismanagement. They have created disaster in this province and are looking for any possible way to find to fix it.

They decided to cook the books, and they did this by taking \$225 million out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. There was no money there, but they told the people of Saskatchewan that

they'd take this money. They took 300 million from the Crowns, 90 million when they established the new Education Fund for capital expenditures. And they fudged the numbers when they did the sales tax and the potash revenue in the budget.

But the lowest thing that they did, they've stooped to a new low, the NDP, when they decided that they would do a cash grab from the sick and the elderly in this province. How low can this government go?

As one person said to me, this is about the NDP picking on the old people of this province. You know, Mr. Speaker, this issue has infuriated people of all ages, of all income levels, and in all walks of life.

I was at the farm home and leisure show this weekend, Mr. Speaker, in Weyburn. And of the most issues that were . . . of all the issues that were brought to my attention, the one that most commonly was spoken about was the issue of the fees that are going to be charged for long-term care in this province.

One lady stopped by with her husband in a wheelchair. And she said to me, I am keeping my husband at home as long as I can, but there's only so much that I can do and when his care becomes such that I can't look after him, I don't know how I'm going to afford to put him in long-term care.

Another man came along and said, why would I, why would I even consider giving my money to this government — \$50,000 a year — to look after me in long-term care? I might as well stay in my own home and pay for someone to come in and look after me in my own home. This is the kind of care that this government will give to me after I've worked all my life and I need long-term care. And they're going to say to me, well for \$50,000 we'll look after you.

It is just not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. Most of the concerns that were brought about long-term care were very general in nature. They were about the worry, the fear, and the concern about how they were going to cope and what they were going to do, either for themselves if they were elderly or if their spouse was reaching the point of where they had to go in long-term care. Many already have people in long-term care and they don't know what's going to happen when these fees go up.

Mr. Speaker, it is a crime what the NDP are doing to our seniors. Many of the people that are seniors now immigrated to this country looking for a better way of life for themselves and for their families. And they spent a century building this country and building their communities. They built railroads, elevators; they built schools, churches, hospitals, rinks, town halls, the list goes on. And, Mr. Speaker, sadly to say, this government has set about destroying many of these things that they've built over the years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Now they've paid taxes all their lives and they have strived to survive, and the NDP rewards them when they're elderly and they require care. And how do they reward them? They're going to tax them and take all their money away to pay for that care.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from the Minister of Health from a *Leader-Post* article of March 28 of this year and the quote reads, "These decisions . . ." and he's referring to the increase in long-term care fees, Mr. Speaker. And the Minister of Health states:

These decisions were not taken lightly, as we recognize that no one likes to pay more . . . We feel these changes are the best and fairest way to sustain our publicly funded health care system in the midst of growing costs, while meeting the challenges of the future for Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, what a disgrace to say this is how we are going to maintain . . . sustain our publicly funded health care system. Guess who gets to pay for their publicly funded health care system? The people of this province that have worked all their lives and saved so they can look after themselves in their retirement. They're now going to pay for the publicly funded health care system. This government, Mr. Speaker, is desperate for cash and will get it no matter who they step on or run over.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been very quick this afternoon to put us down over here because we're defending the elderly and the sick of this province. Well, Mr. Speaker, the people on this side of the House believe in our seniors. We respect them for what they've done and we believe that they should have the proper care when they're old and they need it. We do not look at them and say we will gouge you and take away every dime you've made.

And when it's gone, what happens to these people? Who's going to look after them then?

Mr. Speaker, did you know that in seniors' complexes that they must declare their income? This government makes them declare their income. And, Mr. Speaker, not only do they have to declare their income, their word is not good enough. I'll tell you what they have to do, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to quote from a directive from the Weyburn Housing Authority.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. And I would like to hear the quote, members.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to quote from a directive from the Weyburn Housing Authority which it outlined how this government treats seniors and how they believe them and how they respect them. It is:

Dear Tenant:

It is the annual review time for your building. As you are aware, your rent is geared to the amount of income you receive. Therefore, as per your lease, we must review your income on an annual basis.

Since your income determines the amount of rent, it is extremely important that we have your correct figures. It is a contravention of your lease when these figures are not as stated. Verification of your income is required to confirm figures on the form. Verification means photocopies of: your old-age pension security cheque, your Canada pension cheque, if cheques deposited at a bank then copy of the bank book or statement, any other income, and income

pages from your income tax return.

This is how we treat the people of this province. Our seniors have to go in and declare what they've made. But that isn't good enough. The people in charge photocopy it to make sure that they are not telling anything that isn't true.

These people — the NDP — they do not respect the seniors of this province and they do not trust them to tell the truth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the people that are not in long-term care presently today have a choice. And many of them will make that choice. They will choose to leave this province and go somewhere else.

But sadly to say, Mr. Speaker, those people that are already in long-term care will not have that option. They will be stuck there, they will have to pay these fees whether they want to or not. They will not have a choice.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Melfort-Tisdale has already quoted from Murray Mandryk's column. But I'd just like to refer to it again. It's a column called, "Boosting nursing home fees just doesn't seem to be fair." And, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to quote one paragraph where it . . . and I quote:

Of course, the NDP coalition government argues that better-off seniors, after all, do have the option of choosing to live in any of the province's 261 private nursing home care facilities, where 2,341 elderly Saskatchewan residents currently reside.

Mr. Speaker, this is very interesting statement by this government. People can choose private nursing homes. Or is the overall objective of this government to phase out publicly funded long-term care in this province?

Mr. Speaker, there has been a directive given to personal care homes in this province showing that the 40-bed limit is being taken off. That will mean that, that facilities can be built above the 40-bed limit. Is it the intention of this government to allow big companies to come into this province to drive the personal care home operators out of business and to drive people by their exorbitant fees into . . . all into private care and do away with the publicly funded system. I would like this government to answer to the people of this province. The directive is, "Following the initiatives announced in our . . ." This directive comes from the Department of Health:

Following the initiatives announced in our health plan, seniors and people with disabilities will have more care to choose from. One of these options includes allowing the development of more personal care homes. As you may know, Saskatchewan Health will be eliminating the current 40-bed limit on personal care homes.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government never made this issue public. Why are they hiding and not telling the people of this province what they're doing, that they're taking away the 40-bed limit.

Mr. Speaker, private care homes in this province provide excellent service — excellent service. And they do it at a fraction of the cost of what publicly funded health care is.

With the 40-bed . . . because this government closed beds all across Saskatchewan, the question is, what is their objective. In Weyburn, at Souris Valley Regional Care Centre, we used to have 300 beds. At the direction of the present government, the beds have been reduced to 135. If it wasn't for personal care homes in this province, where would these people have gone that have not been able to get into publicly funded health care systems?

This government has absolutely no regard for what happens to people. The directive goes out — reduce the beds, reduce the beds. We're in a situation, Mr. Speaker, where we have more people that are requiring long-term care, not less, but the direction from this government is close beds in long-term care facilities.

And they somehow say this as a positive issue. We will reduce the beds. We don't know where the people are going to go, but we will reduce the beds.

Mr. Speaker, what is this government really up to? It makes me really wonder when the members opposite are so concerned about what I'm saying here, and about that now their plan to lift the 40-bed cap is out in the open.

So the question is, what really is this government up to. And I think it's time they came clean with the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, this brings up the whole issue of needs, and compassion and respect for the seniors of Saskatchewan.

The member from Melfort-Tisdale spoke some very eloquent words about this, and truly expressed the feelings of the seniors in this province. How they are so concerned, and they're so fearful that they're not going to have enough money to look after their own care, they're not even thinking about their other needs and themselves. They're thinking can I, do I have enough money to provide for my care?

(16:45)

They're not thinking about the impact that will come when the realization hits when they do not have the extra money to spend on personal needs, when they do not have the extra money that they would like to buy things for their family, as the member for Melfort-Tisdale said.

This government has totally disregarded the personal needs of these people. They do not have regard for the quality of life that these people would like to enjoy in their retirement. These people have saved all their lives — they've been frugal — and this is the reward they get after all these years.

This government says here's an easy way to get \$7 million and who is going to fight back? Are these people going to be able to fight us? They thought not.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they thought wrong because these people and their families are fed up with this government and they're not going to sit back any longer and take this and say we will pay, we won't say anything. They have had it.

This government has taxed them to death, they have downloaded on them, they have taken away services, they have pretty much destroyed what rural Saskatchewan had come to enjoy. And now this, now this. And they think people are going to sit back and accept it. They're not going to accept it any more.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Melfort-Tisdale spoke about the exorbitant fee increases. And, Mr. Speaker, it's almost unbelievable. I think many people have not even grasped what this really means; that this government can take up to 90 per cent of a senior's income — leaving them very few dollars — and that is to pay for their drug costs, for other personal needs, and for anything else that they might want.

This won't even cover most of their drug costs. Where do they think these people are going to get the extra dollars to pay for their extra needs? Are they going to now have to dip into their assets? They're going to have to get the money from other family members?

How in the world, Mr. Speaker, is this an appropriate way to treat the elderly of our province? It is just not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read from the government's directive about increasing long-term care fees, the fact sheet it's called. And I quote:

We recognize that no one likes to pay more, however given the rapidly rising costs of health care, government can no longer afford to heavily subsidize those who can better afford their own care.

Mr. Speaker, this in light of the fact of the record of this government. Where in the world is their priorities? They have money to throw away on SPUDCO — \$28 million that the minister said was a success story. They have \$80 million to put into a land titles that does not work. They spent money in Australia. All over the world travelling and it's fine, but we don't have money to look after the seniors in this province. What are the priorities of this government?

I think the people of this province have figured out long ago what their priorities are and they're not very happy about that.

Mr. Speaker, no one in this province . . . Now I'm referring back to this fact sheet that is the directive, the increase in long-term care fees, and how this government can no longer afford to heavily subsidize those who can better afford their own care.

No one can pay for health care throughout their life in this province, Mr. Speaker. But when the people get old, this government, the NDP, choose and tell them how much they're going to have to pay. This is absolutely despicable, it is just

inconscionable that they are doing and this government has finally shown their true face.

Mr. Speaker, people have to pay taxes all their life. I think we've talked about that a lot and how people pay and pay and pay. And when they get old, they expect to be able to keep the dollars that they have scrimped and saved so that they can look after themselves.

In Saskatchewan, that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. They find out that they have . . . they do not have timely access to health care, and now they find out that they do not have access to long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, many people in this province who are elderly — many that are not elderly — but today we're speaking about the elderly in particular and the disabled, those people are waiting months, sometimes years, just for basic health care. We have people that need knee replacements, hip replacements and they are on two years or longer waiting lists.

Mr. Speaker, there was a lady on the radio this morning and she was speaking about that she's 75 years old and she's waiting — I believe something to do with her back — she's on a two-year waiting list. She gets about four hours sleep a day because of the pain that she's in. And this government has money for everything else but they do not have money to help people that need this.

If they cannot provide the care here, then they should provide it out of province. This lady should not have to wait two years, nor should all the other 10,000-plus people in this province that are on waiting lists have to wait while this government spends their money in every other way but on health care, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, in a submission to the Romanow commission on March 4, 2002, Premier Calvert stated that the government has, and I quote:

. . . a responsibility to ensure that changes to the single most important social program in our country are understood by and acceptable to the people we serve.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know if Premier Calvert and the members of the NDP government . . .

The Speaker: — I would just remind the member that she is to address members of the Legislature by their title or their constituency.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier of the province and the members opposite actually talk to people and ask them if they would like the changes, if they understood, and if they were acceptable. The Premier of the province stated:

. . . a responsibility to ensure that changes to the single most important social program (referring to health) in our country are understood by and acceptable to the people we serve.

Well, Mr. Speaker, seniors are confused and they're upset. They are not willing to accept these changes. They do not understand, nor do they accept why they are having to pay these exorbitant fees to pay for the mismanagement of this government.

And this week and the Premier of Saskatchewan stated that he would confer with people about this important issue before, before he made changes. I daresay, Mr. Speaker, that this did not happen. And the people of this province, and especially seniors, are very upset that they were not consulted. They found out on budget day that this was happening.

What happened during the bus tour, Mr. Speaker? Did the Premier of the province and his NDP colleagues, did they ask the people that they met with in rural Saskatchewan and across this province if they would be willing to pay \$3,500 a month for health care in this province?

I can tell you what happened in Bengough, Mr. Speaker. They drove into Bengough and turned around and drove back out and the people that were waiting at the RM (rural municipality) office never seen the people that came there on the bus tour — that's what happened. That's how they conferred with the seniors of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give you another quote from the Premier at the Romanow Commission, and the Premier has stated many times that he does not believe in shifting the cost of health services to the sick. However I have heard from many seniors who have fallen ill. These are seniors that have other illness other than old age. They might have Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's and now those people that are sick and elderly are going to have to pay for 90 per cent of their care.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that that is what the people of this province would call shifting the cost of health care services to the sick. Mr. Speaker, the NDP have not created . . . have not only created a two-tier approach, they have created a multi-level approach in this province because how it is determined that you pay is on your wealth. And I have to notice, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite, when the member from Melfort-Tisdale was speaking, were hollering from their seats that, you know, what we were doing was subsidizing the rich and sock it to the rich.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province that have put away some dollars to look after themselves in their retirement should be applauded, not mocked, by this . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — They did it because they believe in looking after themselves, and they believe that it's the right thing to do, and they are proud of what they have done, Mr. Speaker. And so they should be. And now at this time in their life when they've taken this initiative and they've done the right thing and been frugal all their life, this government is going to take away those dollars. They're going to use it because they've mismanaged this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — They don't have enough money to balance

their books. And they ran out of ideas of how they could cook the books, so then they decided to increase the fees to seniors.

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. I would just like to remind once again the member about language that's been allowed in this Assembly and not to use any statements that are declared unparliamentary.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that terminology. The members opposite have fudged the books — fudged the budget — and now the people of this province are having to pay for their mistakes and fill in the gaps, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has . . . now I've lost my place here.

Mr. Speaker, I have had many seniors . . . and all my colleagues have, and I'm sure the members opposite are getting the same kind of phone calls where seniors are calling or writing letters daily telling us that they're not happy with the changes that they have seen and that they might have to pay come October.

Mr. Speaker, many seniors are fearful because they think these charges are in place already. I have had people coming to me that have family in Souris Valley Regional Care Centre in Weyburn and saying, well they're going to have to pay \$3,000 next month. And thankfully I can say to them, this isn't till October.

But these people already know what the bill is going to be to them. So to say that there's only 120 people in this province that this is going to affect, is absolutely not the fact, Mr. Speaker. It is misleading. The people of this province that are in long-term care, the majority are going to see some kind of an increase, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, seniors that are calling and writing are not only concerned about the amount that they are going to have to pay for their actual fees. They are concerned about how they are going to be able to afford to pay for prescription drugs and for their other personal care needs.

Mr. Speaker, seniors have seen the cost of long-term care increase from 10 per cent to a whopping 152 per cent of the fee that they are paying today. And this government somehow thinks that that is an appropriate way to treat the seniors of this province.

Who else, Mr. Speaker, who else in this province would sit back and take a 152 per cent increase in a fee that they were charged and do nothing about it? No one. And yet this government thinks that they can impose these fees on the sick and the elderly because so many of them have no voice. They have no one to speak for them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Many of the people that are long-term care in Weyburn in level 3 and 4 have no family, they have no one to advocate on their behalf, and this government thought that they could get away with this.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they're not going to get away with this. Because the people of this province are furious and they can

hardly wait until there's an election and they will show this government what they think of their behind-the-door tactics of trying to charge the sick and the elderly of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of the NDP using a progressive tax which shifts the burden over to the sick and the elderly. Mr. Speaker, it is shifting the burden of the health care onto certain individuals in our province. How can that be acceptable?

Mr. Speaker, this government is bound and determined to take every cent these people have earned before they die. Mr. Speaker, the ones that can leave, will leave. But most are not able to because they have no means to leave and they will become wards of the state.

Mr. Speaker, I received . . . or there was a letter actually in my local paper, and I'd like to quote from it. Actually, Mr. Speaker, it would be most appropriate if I read the whole letter. And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from this. It's from a lady from Yorkton, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the letter is headed: "It could happen to you."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It now being slightly past the hour of 5 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 7 p.m. tonight. Or pardon me, stands recessed until 7 p.m. tonight.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.