

EVENING SITTING

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 3 — Long-Term Care Home Fees

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise again this evening and continue debate on the motion that was introduced this afternoon by the member for Melfort-Tisdale. And the motion reads:

I move:

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, I'd just like to review a few of the things that I spoke about this afternoon and that the member for Melfort-Tisdale spoke about, for those listening tonight that were not able to be involved with the debate this afternoon.

And, Mr. Speaker, first of all we'd like to reiterate the part and the facts about the actual increase which amounts to 90 cents out of every dollar that the people have that they have to pay to the government in order to stay in long-term care after October 1 of this coming year.

And, Mr. Speaker, for citizens of the province that have not yet received the information on this, I'd just like to inform them that as of today the fee in Saskatchewan — the minimum fee — is \$828 a month, plus 50 per cent of income over \$994 a month, for a maximum of \$1,561 a month, leaving a minimum disposal income of \$166.

When we go into the new long-term care fees beginning in October, the minimum fee will remain the same at \$828 a month; however, after that 90 per cent of the individual's income over \$994 a month can be taken from this person to a total maximum fee of \$3,875 a month leaving the citizen — the elderly — only \$166 of disposal income, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot actually believe to this day — although I've known since the budget that this was happening — I cannot actually believe that the NDP (New Democratic Party) could be this cold-hearted to do this to the people of Saskatchewan, the sick and the elderly of our province — to actually impose this kind of a fee on them and to expect that the citizens of this province would somehow agree that this is an acceptable practice and this is okay to charge the sick and the elderly to care for them in their old age and when they can't look after themselves to leave them \$166 a month for extra income. That's to pay for their drugs, other personal items that they need, and any other thing that they want to spend money on. If they want money to spend on their families for whatever reason, for gifts, this is all the money.

I would like to ask the members opposite how many of them could survive on \$166 a month. I think the answer would be none of them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget was balanced in many various ways by some very creative bookkeeping and I went through these issues earlier on, Mr. Speaker: the \$255 that was taken from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund of which there is no money there to take the dollars from; the \$300 million that was taken from the Crowns. We do not know if there is adequate assets in the Crown or adequate dollars in the Crown to take \$300 million. Mr. Speaker, did they have to borrow this money in order to move it into the General Revenue Fund? Mr. Speaker, the \$90 million that was borrowed to put into the education capital tax.

And, Mr. Speaker, again we are looking at this and saying, in light of all of this, the sick and the elderly have been taxed now to help to pay for the deficit in this province and to help try and balance the books.

Mr. Speaker, also on this same issue, I'd just like to mention that another way that the books were tried to . . . that the NDP has tried to add dollars to the budget and to work towards balancing it was that they increased the VLTs (video lottery terminal) in this province by 400. Again, Mr. Speaker, we see the NDP government trying to raise funds on the backs of addicted in this province. This is supposed to generate revenues of fifteen hundred million . . . \$15 million, the direct responsibility of the member from Melville, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the government has mismanaged this province so bad in the '90s, Mr. Speaker, that we have now let . . . all the rest of the country has left us behind . . .

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

I would just like to remind the member that the topic under discussion is the motion with respect to long-term care fees, and if she could relate her comments to that.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would be happy to do that. I would like to read from a letter, Mr. Speaker, that was in my local paper, *Weyburn This Week*, and it's written by a lady from Yorkton who is very concerned about the increase in long-term care fees. And so I'd like to read it to you as part of the record, Mr. Speaker.

And the heading of the letter is called, "It could happen to you." And I quote:

October 1, 2002, could spell Doomsday for our senior . . . (citizens) of this province. (This) . . . is the day our government plans to implement their budget and to increase the fees of residents in long-term care anywhere from 0 per cent to 148 per cent depending on their level of income. I am talking about our spouses, our parents, and our grandparents, who have been the backbone of Saskatchewan and who in most cases, cannot speak for themselves.

As of October 1, 2002, these residents will be required to pay \$828 (Mr. Speaker) plus 90 per cent of their portion of their gross income between \$994 and \$4,380.

And then in the letter the lady goes on to show the examples of how people that make \$1,500, have gross income of \$1,500 will

then have to pay \$1,283 to a maximum of, if you have \$4,380 income, you would pay the total of \$3,875. And the letter goes on:

Allow me to give you a typical example of a married couple, who through no choice of their own, have had to place their spouse in a long-term (care) facility. They have been married for 40+ years, have raised a family, worked . . . (hand-in-hand), paid their taxes, and saved money for their retirement. They have also lived at a time where the husband was the bread winner and his wife remained at home to care for their family, entering the work force after the children have left home. Suddenly, the husband becomes ill: his wife is unable to care for him, and after much emotional anguish, she has no choice but to place him in a long-term care facility. This has not been their dream for their golden years but they both must adapt as best as they can.

Now let us look at the fees the husband must pay under the new proposed budget. The husband's gross annual income is \$58,000 and his wife's is \$20,000 for a combined total of \$78,000.

The husband's fee will be based on half the combined income; \$39,000 per year or \$3,250 a month. Under the new budget, the husband will be required to pay \$828 plus 90 per cent of his income over \$994/month. Based on this fee structure, he will be paying \$2,856 per month or \$34,300 each year. The bill does not stop here for there are additional costs such as prescriptions, incontinent supplies, personal items, etc. which amount to \$350 a month or \$4,200 a year. Now the total cost is \$38,500. His gross income has almost been eaten up, however, he still has to pay income tax.

His wife sees their income dwindling but she also has bills to pay — the same bills that she had when he lived at home. She is left in a situation where property tax, insurance, utility bills, house maintenance, etc., their once shared financial responsibility, rests solely on her shoulders. His wife has very little left to live on.

Last year our province lost 13,000 income tax earners to other provinces. This budget is forcing couples who are at retirement age or who have retired — but who also pay income tax — to rethink their plans to remain in Saskatchewan if indeed the budget is passed. Can our government, because of their own mismanagement, continue to lose people who sustain the province's economy?

I have two questions to ask the government in Saskatchewan:

1. Did you meet with seniors to hear their concerns before you brought down the budget?
2. If you were to become ill, would your hospital costs be paid? Those residents in long term care who are ill, will be expected to pay for most of their care. Perhaps it is time we shared those costs.

It is a sad day when the people being affected are the people who are at the stage of their life where they have the least ability to fight it or even understand the proposed change. Is this the government who professes to care for the elderly. I think not!

End of letter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have also received a letter from an elderly woman in Yorkton and here's what she has to say about the long-term care fee, and I quote:

I have talked to many seniors who have spouses in nursing homes. They are truly frightful and feel so helpless to do anything about it.

And, Mr. Speaker, another elderly woman who — I cannot repeat the things that she said about this budget — who phoned our office. The budget is affecting people, Mr. Speaker, in ways that they never could have imagined in these years when they have saved for their retirement. They thought they were able to look after themselves and now this comes, put on their plate. They have no option; they have no choice. The government has delivered them this lot.

And I'd like to refer, Mr. Speaker, to a letter from a woman that wrote to us on behalf of her parents, and I quote:

My mom and dad's combined income is just above the maximum, therefore they will have to pay \$3,875 a month. A combined income of 52,500 divided by two is not really wealthy regardless of what this government defines it as. This monthly payment, along with prescription drugs and personal necessities for my dad, will take all of the money my dad saved in RRSPs and retirement funds. Another reality is that this budget proposes leaving \$166 a month for drugs and personal expenses. My mom pays over \$320 a month for these expenses alone.

Mr. Speaker, this woman writes:

This government is now taking everything my parents worked so hard for.

She indicates that her mother must also pay property tax, income tax, insurance, and other financial responsibilities to support herself.

In her letter, Mr. Speaker, the woman urges the government to look upon this issue very seriously because it will result in even more people leaving the province. No one will want to retire here. This woman, the daughter, lives in Alberta and as you are aware, the maximum long-term care fee for seniors in Alberta as of January 1 of this year is \$991.71 for a private room.

Mr. Speaker, I know what this woman is thinking. She is thinking, I would be better off to move my parents to Alberta, where she could be closer to them and where it would be much cheaper for them to live in long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, so in the end we won't just have a mass exodus of young people from our province but we will also be forcing seniors out of our province because they simply cannot afford

to stay here. Mr. Speaker, the young people that have left, now their parents will leave, and possibly their grandparents will follow if they are still able to.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked to many people and one thing that I have heard retired people say, when they find out about the long-term care fees, is that I have lived here all my life, I have paid my taxes, I have been a good citizen, and because I saved for my retirement and I can look after myself, I am being penalized by this government.

Mr. Speaker, these people are saying, well I won't be paying because I will be leaving. This is the choice that this government has left with these people.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a letter from a gentleman from Saskatoon, and I'd just like to read a few quotes from it. And the heading of the letter is, "Budge hit will drive seniors west." And it's actually an article in *The StarPhoenix*, and he writes:

Most of Saskatchewan's retired teachers and government workers are already receiving their pensions in Calgary or Victoria and won't be returning to face this tax.

While the province needs to increase its population, the government has added one more reason not to come here to seek a place to retire. Not only will we tax your income, as most provinces do, but we will take 90 per cent of the remainder in fees when you can no longer speak up for your rights and have to rely on (the care of) others . . .

. . . it is an overwhelming assault.

Who will be next if we stand by and allow the government to go through with this? Maybe it will decide to confiscate the income of widows over 70, dentists who made more than \$40,000, or any farmer who has bucked the trend and shown a profit.

It is a time for change in attitude and government. The only alternative is to give up and move west, grandparents in tow.

Mr. Speaker, that is a sad commentary of how the people of this province are feeling because of the way this government has treated the elders and the seniors in our province.

Mr. Speaker, generally it is the individual who determines what he or she can or cannot afford. But in Saskatchewan the government wants to make that decision for people. In Saskatchewan the government wants to play Big Brother. In Saskatchewan the NDP thinks that it can manage taxpayers' money better than the individuals that earn that money.

Mr. Speaker, because of this attitude, it is chasing people to other provinces. Mr. Speaker, people are voting with their feet and it isn't even election day yet.

Mr. Speaker, many people simply cannot afford to stay in this province. It's not that they don't love their province; it's not that they don't want to be here; but they cannot afford to stay here any longer. And this is just one more way that these . . . this government is downloading onto the people of our province

and asking them to pay for their mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to tell you a little story about a gentleman that we met when we were doing the Grow Saskatchewan meetings. And it just shows how people love their province and they would like a way to come back here if they could.

He was a man that had lived in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and he moved to Calgary. And he came back here about three years ago, and he worked here, and now he's contemplating whether he should go back. Actually he's from the constituency of Indian Head-Milestone. And he said, well you know, I really believe that people would like to come back to Saskatchewan if they had a reason. And he said, if you took all the ex-Saskies and put them in McMahon Stadium in Calgary and said, who wants to go home, that 90 per cent of the people would stand up and say, yes. And Mr. Speaker, it is our obligation as people that are elected to the legislature of the province of Saskatchewan to encourage them to find ways to make them want to come back to Saskatchewan where they can have good opportunity and a good future for their families.

(19:15)

And, Mr. Speaker, with this latest move by the government of increasing fees for long-term care, we just see one more reason why people are deciding either to leave Saskatchewan or not to return.

Mr. Speaker, there is another . . . one more letter from Yorkton that we received, and I would just like to quote a few lines from this. And I quote:

Our drug bill necessities — eye care, dental care, drugs, and over-the-counter supplies — run between 6 and \$7,000 per year. We have been hard-working citizens all our life and therefore have been highly taxed to support the many social programs and others that, in many cases, have been highly mismanaged.

Mr. Speaker, this couple is very disappointed in the government's fee increase to long-term care. They don't feel that it is fair, and they feel that they have already paid more than their share throughout their lifetime.

The government tries to justify these fee increases by saying the increases only affect those who can afford them. What a cruel joke, Mr. Speaker. It affects thousands of people — not only those who are in nursing homes who have to pay, but it also affects all their families who have to become responsible to help offset the costs that they will now not be able to pay because of the increase in fees and the small amount of dollars that are left for them for disposable income.

Mr. Speaker, who is this government to tell people what they can or cannot afford? What choice do the people have if they require a high level of care like level 3 or 4? They do not have the option to go into private nursing homes, Mr. Speaker.

In my constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, Mr. Speaker, we have excellent private care homes. In the city of Weyburn, we have three that I can think of: one run by Nancy Pulfer, one by

Susan Grohn, and one by Heather Hauptstein. They run absolutely excellent private care homes. And I hate to say, Mr. Speaker, what would have happened to the people that are in their homes had the government . . . The government decreased the number of beds that were available in publicly funded long-term care, Mr. Speaker, and people went into private care homes. If these private care homes had not been available these people would have had no place to go, Mr. Speaker, so I commend these young entrepreneurs in the city of Weyburn and throughout the province who have taken the initiative to open private care homes and to serve a much need of care that the elderly in our province needed.

But, Mr. Speaker, the only real choice that many people have is to go into level 3 or 4 because in some private care homes that level of care is not provided.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when they find now that they cannot afford this care, they are going to have to make a choice of whether they can afford to stay in this province or whether they can leave.

And, Mr. Speaker, we find and our . . . the member from Melfort-Tisdale spoke of this earlier and said that the maximum long-term care fees in Manitoba are \$1,860 a month and in British Columbia the maximum is \$1,500 a month. And so we see, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan is not competitive with our neighbouring provinces on long-term care fees. So, Mr. Speaker, we are wondering why is Saskatchewan the only province in Western Canada that cannot compete on the level of fees that are charged in the long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, this government wants to play chance with the people of this province. I guess if we all know the game Monopoly where you went around the board and you, you could land on chance, you could land . . . or take or get a chance or you could play community chest. And I think that's really what this government . . . it's been a while since I played that game but you always wanted to land on chance or community chest or get to go by go free.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government seems to be playing this game with the people of the province. And it's a sad commentary on what's . . . where this government has come to. They've mismanaged and wasted millions of dollars and now they are simply extending their hands deeper into the taxpayers' pocket and asking them to put more dollars towards balancing the budget in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province are getting tired of these tricks and they shudder every time the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) makes another announcement. And they shudder every time the minister of Economic Development makes another announcement. And they shudder every time this government unfolds another budget because they know that somehow, somewhere, this government will pick off another group, another age . . . age segment, another level of government, another industry that will have to be taxed to pay for their mismanagement.

Once again they will download the cost and try and find a way to find dollars to balance their budget, Mr. Speaker. Someone

has to pay for this mismanagement. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this budget not only used all kinds of creative bookkeeping but they also turned to the seniors of this province and asked them to pay \$7.4 million out of their hard-earned savings to try and help to balance the books in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government has reached a new low — balancing the books on the backs of the sick and the elderly. The people of this province, Mr. Speaker, and I might say in every corner of the province — in the cities, in the towns, in the rural areas — are asking one question, Mr. Speaker, and that is: when is the next election? Believe me, the people of this province are saying it cannot come soon enough.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting, and my colleagues, the member from Melfort-Tisdale who has brought forth the motion today asking this government to reconsider what they are doing to the seniors of this province. Ad we are committed, should we become government, to hold the line on long-term care fees.

We believe the citizens of this province, the sick and the elderly, should be treated with respect and dignity and they should be able to keep their hard-earned dollars that they have worked a lifetime for.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that I will be seconding this motion and I encourage the members opposite to get up in their place tonight and to debate this issue and to tell the people of Saskatchewan why they raised the fees, why they increased them to \$3,875; why they left the people of this province with \$166 disposable income.

I want them to explain to the sick, to the elderly, and long-term care, to the families of those people who are worried, who do not know how they're going to keep their family in long-term care. I want the NDP government of this province to explain to the people of this province how they can justify this move. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter into the debate tonight about long-term care and I'm going to dispense with the artificial indignation and the self-righteous rhetoric because I do have a great respect for the seniors of this province. I want to bring some clarity to the debate and I'm going to provide some facts to you and through you to the members of the Assembly and the public who are listening tonight.

Without these facts it's difficult for the people of Saskatchewan to have a true assessment of long-term care and the issues surrounding this, which I wrote myself — this speech. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's also the danger that scaremongering tactics such as we've heard in the last two speeches — and talk about masters of misleading information. Some people could find themselves living in poverty. Can you imagine someone saying that? This would be harmful to some individuals and their families as they worry unnecessarily about how this may affect them or their families. The truth is no one living in long-term care lives in poverty, and I'm going to speak about that in a few minutes.

That said, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to talk about is long-term care and the Canada Health Act. Certain core services guaranteed under the Canada Health Act must be fully paid for by both levels of government — the provincial and the federal — services like hospital and physician care. And I think we all understand that. For other additional provincial health services not included in the Canada Health Act, like drug coverage, home care, and long-term care, there is a shared cost between provincial and federal governments and citizens.

The 2002-2003 provincial budget for long-term care is \$337 million. That's the provincial budget for long-term care. This is an increase of 10 million over last year's budget, or 3 per cent.

The government currently subsidizes 76.4 per cent of long-term care costs and the accommodations in long-term care. With the current fee increase, the government will still subsidize long-term care by 73.9 per cent. The decrease of 2.5 per cent will be picked up in the increase in the long-term care fees. With the addition of the revenue collected from those fees, and the provincial share of long-term care, the 2002-2003 budget for long-term care is \$445.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, none of us like to pay more for services. With the rapidly rising cost of health care, which is 6 to 8 per cent a year, it is increasingly difficult to subsidize at our current rate.

Mr. Speaker, the average monthly cost of a nursing home bed is approximately \$4,018 per month, per person, or \$48,210 per year. We will be asking residents in long-term care to pay a greater share of the actual cost of their care, up to a maximum of \$3,875 per month.

Now this is an important paragraph in my speech tonight, Mr. Speaker, for people to listen to. Long-term care residents pay an income-tested residence charge. The fees are calculated based only on income, not assets like homes, savings, land. And the members from Melfort and from Weyburn have talked tonight about people losing their savings. This is wrong. The fees for long-term care are calculated on income only.

Under the new fee structure, the minimum fee will remain the same, \$828 per month, and there will be a new maximum of \$3,875 per month. This new maximum will reflect more closely the full cost of providing long-term care. Low-income residents, who comprise one-third of the residents in long-term care, will continue to pay the minimum without change. The government is committed to continue to provide a publicly subsidized long-term care system for individuals based on assessed need.

Tonight I also want to talk about the services long-term care facilities provide.

Mr. Speaker, in my previous position as SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) president, associate minister of Health, and minister responsible for Seniors, I've travelled extensively around the province and visited the vast majority of long-term care facilities or, as we more commonly call them, nursing homes. Having a first-hand look at the range of care and accommodation was very informative and it was useful in my various roles.

However, I've recently had a more up-close-and-personal

experience as my father just entered a nursing home. As his daughter, it is very reassuring to know that my dad is safe, well cared for, and content. The care provided in the home is excellent and extensive. My dad is in Sherbrooke where they have adopted the Eden model of care. There is a real commitment to making the residents feel that they are at home. There are pets on the premises and a homey atmosphere with plants, music, and comfortable furniture.

Not only is there the obvious benefit of accommodation and home-cooked meals, there is also housekeeping, laundry, and maintenance services. On top of these benefits, there is the important aspect of personal care and safety — assistance with dressing, bathing, personal grooming, and just getting around, be it by walker, wheelchair, or hands-on support.

Mr. Speaker, the availability of nursing care at the homes is something else that is included in the monthly fee calculation. Registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, licensed practical nurses, special care aides, health care aides, and daily living attendants provide professional nursing care, supervision, and assistance to residents on a 24-hour basis.

There are also physiotherapists, recreational therapists, and occupational therapists to help each individual resident achieve and maintain their maximum mobility and activity. The important of socializing and recreation is also stressed.

As you can see, much of the care in nursing homes relates to the activities of daily living. The monthly fee, plus the government subsidy, includes all operating costs for the facility and enables residents like my dad to live comfortably. My parents could never afford this kind of care if left to pay for or even organize this on their own.

Mr. Speaker, prior to October of 2000, people were finding that in some cases the spouse of a resident that continued to live in the community did not have enough money left to pay for essentials. To address this concern, involuntary separation is now offered as an option. Involuntary separation is a term used to recognize those situations where married couples live in separate dwellings for reasons beyond their control — for example, one spouse lives in the community and the other lives in a nursing home.

In this case, a couple may choose this involuntary separation designation for the purpose of determining the fee that will be charged. It's very important to note that choosing this option does not change a couple's marital status. They are still married. This option is of benefit when the resident of the nursing home has a lower income than his or her spouse in the community. This option is offered to the couple, including common-law couples, when it is to their advantage in terms of calculating the charge for the resident in the nursing home. The Department of Health can be contacted for further information on this option.

(19:30)

What this means to spouses is that they can still live in their home in the community. Again, I stress this option is only used when it is to their advantage to achieve the lower fee calculation. And they still remain married.

It's also important to be aware of the income tax implications of living in long-term care. The monthly fee can be claimed as an annual medical expense on the income tax return. There's also a seniors' tax credit of \$750. In 2002, that significantly benefits senior citizens when calculating their provincial income tax. I want to say to all seniors, make sure you're getting all the income tax benefits you are entitled to, and there's two *StarPhoenix* articles, one on April 8 and one on April 15 by Terry McBride that are useful to read for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, another concern of long-term care residents and their families is the cost of drugs. Medication costs in long-term care are in addition to the monthly fee. However the Saskatchewan drug plan provides assistance to those with the lowest incomes and/or those who are having high drug costs in relation to their income. Application forms can be obtained from any pharmacy or by calling the drug plan. And I think this is useful to repeat because even my own family didn't know this. Application forms can be obtained from any pharmacy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly talk about my experience with the seniors in this province. My riding of Saskatoon Eastview has the highest percentage of seniors in the country. I've had the pleasure of meeting with many of these wonderful people. I am constantly impressed by their vigour, their enthusiasm, and their optimism. The seniors organizations of this province are also a formidable force, and I have great respect for their dedication to enhancing the lives of older persons.

I want to thank the members of the Provincial Advisory Committee of Older Persons for their contribution to the Minister Responsible for Seniors on government policies that address a broad range of seniors issues. I want to thank all of these people for making my job as minister responsible for Seniors so memorable. I also want to encourage all seniors in the province to continue to contribute their valuable experience and insight to policymakers.

With all of that said, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to:

Amend the motion by removing all words after "Assembly" and replace with the following:

encourage the government to continue its long-standing and ongoing process of reviewing all fees and charges not included under the Canada Health Act, including long-term care home fees.

This amendment is seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to join with my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Eastview, in the debate that has come about as a result of the members' opposite resolution. And what I want to talk about is the whole issue of the sustainability of our health system.

As members will know, health costs in this province have risen by over 50 per cent since the mid-1990s. And members will know that when we came to government in 1991 our health budget was about \$1.2 billion. Our health budget now, Mr.

Speaker, is in excess of \$2.2 billion. So we've seen in essence a growth in health spending in this province by over \$1 billion in the last decade.

Governments across the country have recognized this fact and in fact in the fall of 2000 I believe . . . or the fall of 1999 I believe, there was a first ministers' meeting with all the premiers wherein the federal government was encouraged and convinced that they needed to add more to health spending across the country in the way of the Canada Health and Social Transfer. And what we began to see was the federal government getting back into funding a portion of health care in this country.

But I can tell the members of the House and the public that today the federal government only pays for about 14 cents on every dollar spent on health care in Saskatchewan and across the country. And we now have the Romanow Commission which is dealing with the whole issue of how we sustain a publicly funded, publicly administered health system in this country.

And there have been various proposals that have been put to the Romanow Commission and the Fyke Commission about how we pay for this — how we pay for this. Our position as a government is that the Canada Health Act needs to be supported. We believe in a publicly funded and a publicly administered health system. We do not believe in two-care . . . or two-tiered health in this country. And in fact we know that the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, who went on quite a diatribe before we broke at 5 o'clock, talked about this being two-tier health care.

Well what I want to say to the member opposite is if she understood the principles of the Canada Health Act she would know that the Canada Health Act applies to hospitals, doctors, and nurses, and there's a whole basket of services that governments are presently providing that fall outside of the Canada Health Act. And long-term care is one of those services, along with ambulance care, home care, drug care, physiotherapy, chiropractic care, and so on and so forth, but the members opposite don't know that. And they like to think that they're the government in waiting in this province, but they don't even understand the Canada Health Act.

Now what I want to say to the members opposite is that they're going to be waiting an awful long time, because when their Health critic and their deputy Health critic — which I really question — but when their Health critic and their deputy Health critic don't know that long-term care falls outside of the Canada Health Act and is not considered part of the publicly funded and administered health system in this country, they really do need to learn a lot before they can ever expect to be government in this province.

Now what I want to say to the members is that, as I've said, since the mid-1990s, health spending in this province has increased by over 50 per cent. And when you think about the amount of money that the federal government is putting into health care in this country, at one time when the federal government ponied up to the plate in the late 1960s, about 50 cents of every dollar we spent in this country came from the federal government. That's no longer the case. And more and

more services have been added to the department of health spending all across the country, including long-term care, ambulance care, chiropractic care, home care, and physiotherapy care, as well as the drug plan. And when you look at the increases in spending across the country, we know that health spending is starting to elbow out other kinds of initiatives that are important to the long-term health of Canada's citizens.

Now as I've said, there are certain core services guaranteed under the Canada Health Act that governments fully pay for and there are other services that are not covered by the Canada Health Act, such as drug coverage and long-term care, that citizens are asked to pay a portion of.

Now currently residents receiving long-term care pay on an income-tested resident fee. And to calculate the fee Saskatchewan Health combines the minimum fee of \$828 with 50 per cent of any income or earned interest the resident has above \$994 a month. And currently the maximum fee is \$1,561 a month. And what that means, Mr. Speaker, is that you can have citizens whose incomes are 50 or 60 or \$70,000 a year in a long-term care facility and they pay a maximum of \$1,561. And based on the current resident fee, the standard resident fee is \$828 and residents retain a minimum disposable income of \$166 for personal supplies, drugs, and so on.

And what I find so interesting about this debate is that this has been the case for low-income residents for years and not once did the members opposite ever raise, on behalf of those low-income residents, the fact that they paid \$868 and only had an extra \$166. But they have no difficulty now raising this fact, but they didn't raise this fact before the events of the budget that the Minister of Finance brought down.

Now what I want to also say is that we know that presently the fee schedule is going to be revised as of October 1, 2002, and for those citizens who pay the current \$1,561 per month, they will see their resident fee go up and this new maximum will reflect more closely the average cost of providing care.

And while the member from Eastview says the average cost is about \$4,000 a month, we know that there are long-term care homes in this province where it costs much more than that to provide care — \$5,000 a month or \$5,500 a month — and those long-term care facilities tend to be the much smaller facilities located in some of our rural communities.

We're going to continue to use the current formula where residents will pay the minimum fee of \$828 plus a percentage of their income above \$994 and this percentage is going to change from 50 per cent to approximately 90 per cent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these people will complain. But you know the opposition is famous for misinformation. Let me give you an example.

Last week in the House we had members of the opposition say that the minister responsible for Sask Water was going to put municipal leaders in jail if they did not provide proper water. He did not say it.

This week, this week what the members opposite are trying to

say in this House is that if you have money in your bank account, like a savings account; if you have GICs (guaranteed investment certificate), treasury bills, mutual funds, a farm, a house, that that's going to be taken away from you as a result of this fee increase. And I call that scare tactics that the opposition have become famous for. It's simply not true.

The Minister of the Environment did not say municipal leaders would be put in jail and, and . . . Well you know what? Listen to the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, and what she talked about was that people's savings were going to be taken away. And that's simply not true. It's an untrue statement. And I can't go any further than that. I can't call it something else. But it's not true.

But people's incomes will be looked at, based on their income tax form. What will be taken into consideration is their old-age pension, their Canada Pension; if they receive the OAS (old age security); if they receive income from the credit union or the bank in the way of interest; if they receive a teacher's pension plan and so on. But the Government of Saskatchewan is not going to make our senior citizens cash in their bank accounts, cash in their land, cash in their mutual funds. The money is saved for their children's inheritance, Mr. Speaker. We're not doing it.

And, Mr. Speaker, day after day we hear this sort of thing misrepresented. And no doubt we'll see a petition in the House calling on the provincial government not to take away our senior citizens' assets. And I want to put it on the public record tonight that no one will be taking away their bank account, their savings, their mutual funds, their farm, or their house, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(19:45)

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, in this budget we're spending \$337 million on long-term care. And that's an increase of over \$10 million, or 3.07 per cent over the last provincial budget on long-term care. As well for a long time, in the province of Saskatchewan, long-term care facilities or nursing homes have collected resident fees. And they collect about \$108.4 million, bringing the total funding for long-term care in the province of Saskatchewan to \$445 million.

Currently the Government of Saskatchewan, through the taxpayers, subsidizes 76.4 per cent of the care and accommodations in long-term care facilities. And with their current fee, the current fee increase, the subsidy will be 73.9 per cent of the cost of providing long-term care. I think that's important for people to understand.

Now I note that the members opposite laughed and giggled and shouted and hooted when the member from Eastview talked about involuntary separation. And I want to make this point. It's not a laughing matter. But you were . . . but the members opposite were laughing, Mr. Speaker, and I find it unacceptable.

Up until October 2000, Mr. Speaker, there was no recognition . . . And this happened in the good old Tory days that some of these members will remember, like the member from Weyburn

who was a big Tory supporter; the member from Estevan, big Tory supporter; the member from Swift Current, big Tory supporter; and the list goes on; and the member from Thunder Creek, big Tory supporter.

They will remember this. When they were in government in the 1980s, if you were a married couple living — and one of you was in a nursing home and the other one was in their own home — your total income was taken into consideration. And as a result of a resolution at SAHO which came in 1996 . . . SAHO, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, called on the province of Saskatchewan to recognize involuntary separation by virtue of the fact that someone had to be in a nursing home. It does not mean their marital status changes — not at all — as the members opposite would like us to believe. What it means is that if the person in the nursing home has a smaller income — and this is particularly important to that spouse who's living not in the nursing home — then only that person's income is recognized for the purposes of the long-term care fees.

Now the members opposite says my nose is growing. My nose is not growing, Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Because the members opposite continue to put on the public record things that are not true. And I would say if anybody has long noses in this place it's the members opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now, Mr. Speaker, we responded to the SAHO resolution and we also responded as a result of complaints from families where the spouse of a resident continued to live in the community but they didn't have enough money left. And I can tell you that it was under the watch of the member from Eastview that this designation was created to assist those spouses living in the community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think there's no question that none of us enjoy increasing the long-term care fees — none of us enjoy it. But when I listen to the members opposite, here's what they'd have us do. They want more money for crop insurance. Spend more money, they say. They want more money for long-term care. They want more money for highways. I heard the member from Wood River say more money for highways. They want more . . .

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

Ms. Atkinson: — They want more money for highways. They want more money for long-term care. They want more money for crop insurance. They want tax cuts, Mr. Speaker, they want tax cuts. The list is endless.

Let's go through *Hansard*. Every day in question period they ask our ministers — more money for municipal government, more money for infrastructure for water, more money for K to 12, more money for the universities. We heard today they want

us to fund the detox centre in Saskatoon, which we're going to do. They want us to fund the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association).

But they want us to cut taxes. And when you are in a situation where revenues are falling, revenues are falling as a result of world economic conditions, as a result in changes to oil and gas, as a result . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. I would just bring to the member's attention that the focus of the debate has to do with long-term care and other fees, and if the member would relate her remarks to that.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I was getting to my point. But somehow you can't look at any kind of ways to raise additional revenue to provide important public services. That's unacceptable. Well I don't know how you square this circle. I do not know how you square this circle. They say, they say cut taxes, spend more, and leave government services — they stay the way they are, which I don't believe, which I don't believe.

And all we have to do is look at what they're doing in British Columbia, and the core services review. That's all we have to do is look there, and that will tell you what these people will do if they ever become government. And what they're doing there is they are contracting out home care services. They're contracting out long-term care services. They're contracting out the kitchens. They're contracting out the laundry. And what it's all about, Mr. Speaker, it's a cheap wage policy so that women, mostly, who work in nursing homes, work in home care, can work for minimum wage instead of 13 to \$14 an hour.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — That's what this operation over there is all about. That's what it's all about. It's about cheap wages, and let's not worry about those poor people that are already poor in nursing homes and only have \$166, but let's worry about those 120 people that earn over \$50,000 a year in income. And I say to the members opposite, that is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've said quite enough on this subject, and . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Nutana that we adjourn debate.

The division bells rang from 19:53 until 20:03.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 29

Calvert	Addley	Atkinson
Lautermilch	Serby	Melenchuk
Cline	Sonntag	

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

Osika	Lorjé	Kasperski
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Goulet	Van Mulligen	Prebble
Belanger	Crofford	Axworthy
Nilson	Junor	Hamilton
Harper	Forbes	Jones
Higgins	Trew	Wartman
Thomson	Yates	McCall

Nays — 12

Krawetz	Draude	Gantefoer
Wakefield	Stewart	

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order. The Clerk will proceed.

McMorris	D'Autremont	Bakken
Weekes		

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order, please. Order. The Clerk will proceed.

Hart	Allchurch	Huyghebaert
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Motion No. 4 — CommunityNet

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're talking about it in Estevan, and Bienfait, Lintlaw, and Rockglen, and in about 187 other locations in Saskatchewan, and they support it.

What are they saying, Mr. Speaker? Please encourage government to continue its leadership in expanding Internet services to our schools, our communities, and government offices by CommunityNet. This is why I am happy to rise today and move the motion on the CommunityNet program at the end of my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

In this increasingly interconnected world we live in, knowledge and access to it has become an essential component to the lives of all our citizens. As a result, we as a proactive government believe that Internet should be considered a public utility service in the same way as basic telecommunications services, water, and electricity.

Continuing in Saskatchewan's tradition of being an advocate of universal and affordable access to essential services, the CommunityNet program has been launched. Mr. Speaker, prior to the advent of CommunityNet, only eight communities received high-speed Internet services. Today there are approximately 46 centres, all of which receive their Internet connections at rates equal to those offered in Regina and Saskatoon. Moreover, it is estimated that under the current CommunityNet plan, residents and businesses in over 100 communities will ultimately receive access to broadband service offerings.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these community-based service offerings will cover approximately 70 per cent of the population of Saskatchewan. With additional work in coordination with SaskTel and other Saskatchewan companies such as Wavecom, a business case is being developed that could potentially increase this coverage to 95 per cent of the population of this province.

It begs the question, Mr. Speaker, how is this accomplished? Well prior to the advent of CommunityNet, there were no telecommunication service providers in rural Saskatchewan that provided high-speed services. As a national broadband task force noted, it was unlikely that market forces would result in high-speed service to small rural and remote communities for the foreseeable future.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, this government decided that SaskTel and that the Saskatchewan Communications Network would be used as the delivery arm for CommunityNet. This organization of public sector entities into an anchor tenant for advanced telecommunication services allows for us the planning and implementation of the best network design province-wide — in other words, a holistic approach as opposed to building in response to separate customer demands on an ad hoc basis. This critical mass to rationalize advancing infrastructure in rural Saskatchewan and the extension of social, educational, and economic opportunities to even the smallest Saskatchewan communities.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the national broadband task force has noted that Saskatchewan's unique CommunityNet model of amalgamated demand throughout the public sector is one of the most advanced approaches in the world.

So, Mr. Speaker, you may be wondering, how does it work? Well the CommunityNet concept is based on co-operation among all players in the public sector such as education, health, libraries, and executive government to form one anchor tenant that pools its resources to achieve a common goal and attain high-speed telecommunications access for the public sector and all Saskatchewan citizens. The Saskatchewan way, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

While the connection of a local school or health facility to CommunityNet does not guarantee that everyone in that town will receive access to high-speed Internet, by connecting public facilities in rural areas the costs for commercial high-speed access to the residents and business of the communities is dramatically reduced, making them comparable to those in urban centres.

Although, Mr. Deputy Speaker, CommunityNet will extend a provincial high-speed communications network and Internet access to over 366 communications, 839 educational facilities, 379 health facilities, 86 First Nations schools, and 249 government offices. The overall cost to the public sector of CommunityNet will be \$70.9 million over the next six years. Schools, health facilities, libraries, and other public service entities will not be required to pay any additional connection or usage costs.

Mr. Speaker, it is a proud tradition of the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and the NDP to bring services to all members of society. CommunityNet is no different. It's connecting those citizens to the future. It's connecting our province to the future.

The tradition and the values that led us to rural electrification have brought us to the installation of information infrastructure across the province, better enabling the delivery of health care, education, and other community services.

Not only this, Mr. Speaker, but this program enables the empowerment of individual people and businesses to gain access to a world of knowledge.

So don't just take my word for it, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at the weeklies.

CommunityNet connects (to) Melville. Melville today celebrated its recent connection to CommunityNet, Saskatchewan's public sector high-speed network . . .

All of Melville's schools now have high-speed capabilities. In the next few months, remaining public institutions will receive high-speed Internet connections. (March 13, 2002.)

Westview celebrates historical moment. Estevan school the first to connect to CommunityNet . . . Estevan School Division chairwoman Shirley Batters noted how Estevan educators are already fully involved in developing and delivering distance education products to schools in other communities . . .

Batters said the school divisions now have untold access to learning sources and on-line courses and that leads to post-secondary learning opportunities (second to none).

La Ronge, *Missinipi News*, February 15, 2002, from the reporter Dallas Hicks:

La Ronge celebrated its connection to CommunityNet today. CommunityNet is the province's public sector high-speed Internet service linking public institutions in three hundred and sixty six communities . . . All of La Ronge's schools now have high-speed Internet. Remaining public institutions (there) will be hooked up in the next few months.

Here we are, from Saskatoon, and Neil Herland says "Something revolutionary is happening, not only here, but in other places across the province. And in this case, they're going to point out what's happening in Strasbourg, Saskatchewan.

It's still a small quiet prairie town, so small the locals don't bother giving the first three digits of their phone number. But two months ago Strasbourg caught up with Canada's biggest cities. The local school got high-speed Internet access and it's having a profound effect on students. This physics class used to be taught using books and a blackboard. Now science concepts are illustrated by visiting Web sites and clicking on animation sequences.

(20:15)

And Lorne Gottselig, a teacher in Strasbourg, says:

Getting high-speed Internet in every school is an excellent idea because it creates a level playing field, you know, what a teacher does in Regina or Saskatoon could be translated over to a teacher that teaches in rural Saskatchewan.

Good news for rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And the list goes on and on and on as we begin to connect our students and our communities and our government through CommunityNet.

So, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion, and I would now like to move the motion before the Assembly:

That this Assembly encourage the government to continue its leadership in expanding Internet services to schools, communities, and government offices throughout the province by the CommunityNet program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. I'm very pleased to rise in my place today to support the motion put forward by the member for Regina Wascana Plains in support of the CommunityNet initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is an interesting motion for a lot of reasons. One, it deals with technology; it deals with the future of Saskatchewan and I think it also is a very good delineation between the philosophy of the government on this side versus the philosophy of the opposition on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, the government on this side believes that there has to be a partnership between many different industries, between private industry, between public industry, and between the co-operative sector. Mr. Speaker, this government has provided all sorts of benefits and worked with private industry to make Saskatchewan a better place.

The members opposite seem to not want to recognize the tax cuts that have been brought in and the relationships with business because they want to accent the negative.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've also been very supportive of the co-operative industry and the credit union movement. And what that has to do with the Internet, Mr. Speaker, is that it gets to the point of dealing with government and what government has to do within those three partnerships. It's like a three-legged stool, and I've already commented on the first two legs. One is the co-operative and credit union sector, the second one is the business one, and the third one is public investment into Saskatchewan.

Now we believe on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, that it's important to invest in technology. I am born and raised in rural Saskatchewan. Everybody in this House knows that. People in Loon Lake know that, in the area. And during the bus tour, it was interesting that one of the mayors introduced the caucus, saying that one of the plants that we had, one of the mayors that we planted many years ago, referred to me as a rural MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) even though I represent Saskatoon Sutherland.

Now the CommunityNet initiative, Mr. Speaker, is a way to bring rural Saskatchewan into the 21st century. One of the problems that Saskatchewan has faced is that it's a land-locked province, that to move its product to market is very difficult. And access to information is also difficult. With CommunityNet and with high-speed Internet throughout the province in all the areas that we're putting high-speed Internet in, it removes that

barrier for trade for Saskatchewan residents.

It doesn't matter where a business sets up when we have high-speed Internet and we have CommunityNet. We are not paving the roads so that you have a better way, a smoother ride to your cottage. We're paving the roads so that industry can transport its goods for economic development. We're not investing in CommunityNet so that members can download hockey scores quickly or look up stocks. We're investing in CommunityNet and high-speed Internet so that there can be businesses located in rural Saskatchewan so that location doesn't matter any more, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet is being invested all over the province, Mr. Speaker. It's our access to Information Highway, to e-business and e-commerce. Mr. Speaker, by investing in CommunityNet, we are giving advantages to our young people in rural Saskatchewan, so that they can have jobs there.

Now the problem, Mr. Speaker, with the opposition is that one, they don't believe in government involvement in the industry. They don't believe in government. I would say that they don't believe in government, period; that they believe government is a way of interfering with business.

And we talked about Alberta envy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now, Mr. Speaker, they would not want to have us involved in CommunityNet or high-speed Internet but the demand in the population is very high.

Now one of the things that they wouldn't believe in is cross-subsidization either, and yet that's one of the things that is actually benefiting a lot of the residents in their constituencies. By blending all of the public sectors into one client CommunityNet, we are able to achieve volume discount pricing, and the cost of CommunityNet of bringing services to provincially funded public facilities in rural areas is of course more expensive than doing it in urban centres, but the price will be basically the same.

The government has used SaskTel and the Saskatchewan Communications Network as the delivery arm for CommunityNet because these Crown corporations already have facilities and exist, which they wouldn't under the plan of the opposition, and which could be built on in all areas of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the opposition seems to want to get in the way. Their philosophy wants to get in the way of what's best for their constituents. They don't want to have STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) because that is against their philosophy, yet it benefits their constituents. And now they don't want to have CommunityNet even though it benefits their constituencies. So I'm pleased to support the motion, Mr. Speaker.

Now CommunityNet unique model of amalgamating demand through the public sector has been described by the national broadband task force as being one of the most advanced approaches in the world.

Mr. Speaker, there's areas in Saskatchewan that have CommunityNet and high-speed Internet when areas of Calgary

don't even have high-speed Internet. And yet it's so much better in Calgary.

Saskatchewan is presently working with SaskTel and Saskatchewan companies such as Wavecom to develop a business case for services that could potentially provide offerings to 95 per cent of the population of the province, Mr. Speaker. That's progress, Mr. Speaker. Altogether CommunityNet will extend the provincial high-speed communications network and Internet access to over 366 communities, 839 educational facilities, 379 health facilities, 86 First Nations schools, and 249 government offices.

The overall cost to the public sector of CommunityNet will be \$70.9 million over the next six years. Schools, health facilities, libraries, and other public service entities will not be required to pay any additional connection or usage cost. Now that's an important point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because in Alberta, their attempt to deal with this — for the schools that are lucky enough to get this — they have to pay a monthly fee. In Saskatchewan they are not going to need to do that.

Now I won't go into all the technical details, Mr. Speaker, because it is getting late in the evening, but here are some quotes of CommunityNet connecting to Moose Jaw.

Moose Jaw today celebrated its recent connection to the CommunityNet, Saskatchewan's public sector high-speed network.

Quote:

Social Services Minister Glenn Hagel and Labour Minister Debra Higgins jointly participated in a Moose Jaw school event for the \$71 million broadband telecommunications network.

All of Moose Jaw's schools now have high-speed capabilities. In the next few months, remaining public institutions will receive high-speed Internet connections.

"By linking our communities to each other and to the future, CommunityNet will have significant benefits for people across Saskatchewan," Hagel said. "This network is our province's on-ramp to the information highway, giving our citizens and students fingertip access to better educational opportunities, improved health care and more public services."

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is in contrast to the opposition's tour of Saskatchewan recently and the lack of people that showed up there. And we talk . . . we hear every day, Mr. Speaker, about their plan to Grow Saskatchewan.

I think, Mr. Speaker, their plan is all wet, Mr. Speaker. They want to have spending on health care. They want increased spending on roads. They want high-speed Internet in their community, but they don't believe in the program. They want spending in education, but they don't know where the money's coming from. They want to cut the taxes so low that they're not sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, instead of Grow Saskatchewan, I think their motto

should be groan Saskatchewan, based on the weight of the debt that Saskatchewan residents will be carrying if their plan is ever implemented.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is also an issue here about Alberta envy, Mr. Speaker, that when you compare the CommunityNet in Saskatchewan versus the plan for Alberta, Mr. Speaker . . . I think it's called SuperNet. I think that also is indicative. I mean they have SuperNet; we have CommunityNet. I mean ours is more friendly and it just seems to be something that we want to be involved with, whereas SuperNet, I think it's a lot of sizzle but not a lot of steak, Mr. Speaker, although I like Alberta steaks, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Why would Saskatchewan want to wait for the Alberta model when we're already two years ahead of them, Mr. Speaker? But we don't hear the opposition talking about that, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Alberta will be building their main telecommunications backbone over the next two years; Saskatchewan already developed an equally robust network.

Now, Mr. Speaker, taxpayers in Alberta will be spending a total of \$362 million over the next five years — \$362. Now do the members opposite remember how much it's going to cost in Saskatchewan? Well I'll remind them, Mr. Speaker — \$71 million. That's the difference.

That's the plan of Alberta, is to spend \$362 million to ensure hospitals and government departments have high-speed access. Saskatchewan's only spending \$71 million and Saskatchewan's including all of the schools as well. In Alberta, schools will be required to pay for monthly access from their own budgets, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here's a quote from a recent member of the opposition that deals with SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network). It goes like this, quote:

I know I have a number of taxpayers and citizens of this province ask me why does Saskatchewan need to have its own television network . . .

But I guess where the citizens and the taxpayers are coming from when they look at the number of channels available to the average person, particularly those persons subscribing to some of the satellite services that are out there, of course then they ask the question why are we spending over \$7 million to have another TV station out there. Could you please comment on that (Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Minister) . . .

Now, Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet has already ensured that the residents and businesses in 237 communities will receive high-speed access. Guess how many in Alberta, Mr. Speaker? Thirty-five, 35 communities are guaranteed high-speed access. How many in Saskatchewan? Two hundred and thirty-seven.

The remaining small centres will only receive services if a private sector company can build a business to pay the rate for accessing SuperNet. What does that mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This means fewer communities will receive services over time in Alberta.

Now how does that . . . how do they square that circle, Mr.

Speaker, where the opposition talks about how it's so much better in Alberta, yet here in Saskatchewan we're getting accolades from all across Canada bringing in high-speed Internet and CommunityNet.

Alberta has signed a contract with Bell Intrigna as the prime contractor for the building of SuperNet. Bell Intrigna will build a separate extended area network that in many cases duplicates existing infrastructure owned by TELUS. This is in effect building a duplicate highway system. Now I ask, Mr. Speaker, how is that effective, efficient use of taxpayers' money? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker. The overall cost could be well over \$400 million.

(20:30)

And then it's up to the market forces to determine if any services will be provided to businesses and residents in that community.

Now I'm all for business. In fact, there are many businesses in my constituency. I work very closely with businesses. I know that we need to have good, strong businesses in the community to pay the taxes and employ the people and that's why this government has done all of the things that it has done in the last 12 years to support businesses growing.

But the members opposite don't seem to realize that there is a role for governments involved in the economy and that is, in this case, CommunityNet and high-speed Internet and into constituencies that are benefiting their own residents.

Now I don't hear members opposite standing up and saying, I'm opposed to CommunityNet; don't bring it to my community. No they're saying, well it should have been here sooner; I want digital cell service in my community.

Well all they have to do is go to Alberta and find out that if their constituency was in Alberta they wouldn't have CommunityNet and they wouldn't have digital cell service. So, Mr. Speaker, there's a difference in philosophy.

Now members opposite are starting to say that Alberta's a total flop and I tend to agree with them on this matter . . .

An Hon. Member: — Just that point.

Mr. Addley: — On that point yes, Mr. Member from Wood River.

CommunityNet is a \$71 million project over five years. This cost provides full access by schools, hospitals, and government offices to the Internet, plus security features, a data network, and site blocking for government offices. Alberta's SuperNet just provides access to raw bandwidth rather than services such as the Internet.

Now raw bandwidth is pretty good but we want more than just raw bandwidth, don't we, members? We want high speed Internet, we want data network, and we want site blocking for government offices. Altogether, CommunityNet will extend this provincial high-speed communications network and Internet access to over 366 communities, 834 educational facilities, 310

health facilities, 86 First Nations schools, and 256 government offices. Schools, health facilities, and other public service entities will not be required to pay any additional connection to user charges.

To date Alberta has connected six communities. Even with SuperNet, parts of Calgary still do not have access to high-speed Internet. CommunityNet has already connected 70 per cent of all the schools in Saskatchewan, 45 per cent of health care facilities, and 100 per cent of First Nations schools.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, I think this is indicative. Alberta has no planned connections to First Nations schools. I think that's a sad reflection on wealthy Alberta not connecting to First Nations schools.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've heard comments that have been reported in the media, just last month on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) from Strasbourg saying:

It's still a small quiet prairie town, so small the locals don't bother giving the first three digits of their phone number (Mr. Speaker). But two months ago Strasbourg caught up with Canada's biggest cities (and they exceeded Canada's biggest cities and they're even beyond Calgary).

Now the member from Wood River is asking where is this coming from. This is a quote from CBC Radio, Mr. Speaker.

The local school got high-speed Internet access and it's having a profound affect on students. This physics class used to be taught (by) using books and . . . black board . . . science concepts are (now) illustrated by visiting web sites and clicking on animation sequences (sort of like the animation that's coming from the opposite side, Mr. Speaker).

(Now) The Saskatchewan Government is investing millions of dollars to bring high-speed Internet to the classroom.

Now, members, we have educators on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and we know that investing in education pays dividends well down the road, and this CommunityNet will pay dividends down the road for Saskatchewan for many years to come.

Now just some headlines from some news releases.

191 Communities To Receive SaskTel High Speed Internet.

There's a long list of communities that are listed starting with Abbey, Aberdeen, Bjorkdale, Blaine Lake, Carnduff, Caronport, Craik, Kipling, Preeceville, Willow Bunch, ending in Zenon Park. There's dozens of communities. Now members want me to read it all, but I'll forgo that for the time being.

CommunityNet . . .

An Hon. Member: — Give us a couple more.

Mr. Addley: — Oh, you want a couple more. Okay, I'll give a couple more, Mr. Speaker. Okay, Abbey, Aberdeen, Birch Hills, Bjorkdale, Blaine Lake, Borden, Briercrest, Broadview,

Buffalo Narrows — it sounds like a song, Mr. Speaker — Burstall, Cabri, Candle Lake, Canwood, Carievale, Carlyle, Carnduff, Caronport, Carrot River, Central Butte.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is not a list of the communities that will be voting NDP next time, although that is true. This is actually the list of people that will be receiving CommunityNet in the future. Central Butte, Chaplin, Christopher Lake, Churchbridge, Clavet, Climax, Coleville, Colonsay, Consul, Coronach, Craik, Creighton, Cudworth, Cumberland House, Cupar, Cut Knife, Dalmeny, Debden, Fox Valley, Francis, Gainsborough, Glaslyn, Goodsoil, Gravelbourg, Grayson, Green Lake, Grenfell, Gull Lake, Hanley, Harris, Hazlet, Herbert, Holdfast, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Imperial — you know, this seemed like a better idea at the beginning, Mr. Speaker — Ituna, Kelliher, Kelvington, Kenaston, Kennedy, Kincaid, Kinistino, Kipling, Kyle, Lafleche. And it goes on and on, Mr. Speaker — I think I'll end that — Turtleford, Meadow Lake, St. Walburg. A whole list of communities will be receiving this, Mr. Speaker.

CommunityNet connects Yorkton. CommunityNet connects Melville. CommunityNet connects Kindersley. CommunityNet connects La Ronge. High-speed hits public sector. Shaunavon connects to CommunityNet. Shaunavon residents are lining up fast to get SaskTel's new high-speed Internet service. CommunityNet connects North Battleford, Mr. Speaker. CommunityNet connects Estevan. And these are not just the communities that will be electing New Democrat members next time, Mr. Speaker. These are communities that receive CommunityNet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — CommunityNet, the broadband telecommunications network that will enable Saskatchewan communities to take a quantum leap forward in Internet access, was officially launched last May, Mr. Speaker. CommunityNet brings together provincial government departments and agencies and the public sectors of education and health.

CommunityNet's first phase will see the creation of an infrastructure to bring high-speed Internet to the schools and health centres in the communities in Saskatchewan. "CommunityNet represents a significant step in bridging the digital divide between rural and urban Saskatchewan regions," the Premier said. It will provide better and faster access to educational resources for rural students and teachers and allow health practitioners in those areas to provide better care to their patients. In addition, CommunityNet will enable government to provide services to Saskatchewan citizens more efficiently and cost effectively.

Mr. Speaker, I did a member statement last year on doctors looking at X-rays of patients hundreds of miles away from each other, and that wouldn't be possible without CommunityNet.

Now, Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet is not just a good idea so that students can download sports scores. This will provide an economic advantage, a hub for Saskatchewan businesses to connect.

Mr. Speaker, I know of a company that sells contact lenses over the Internet. It doesn't matter what community in Saskatchewan

that he does business with, Mr. Speaker. He can set up shop in any community in Saskatchewan that has CommunityNet and he will be able to access the world basically, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know this will be beneficial to the member for Rosthern and the member for Wood River, but from my perspective it seems that bringing CommunityNet and high-speed Internet to the province must be what the former premier, Tommy Douglas, felt like when he was flying over Saskatchewan and he looked down and he saw darkness. And so he decided to bring in rural electrification to all of the farms and all of the communities in rural Saskatchewan many, many years ago. And that was one of his proudest things.

He brought in medicare. He brought in a whole bunch of beneficial social programs. But when he was asked what was one of the things that he was most proud of, flying over Saskatchewan at night and seeing the farmyards with the lights twinkling, that had a huge advantage to Saskatchewan people. It changed people's lives for the better for many, many years to come. And unfortunately today, Mr. Speaker, many people take it for granted.

I grew up in a community where it had party lines. And farms in other parts of Canada, even recently, had party lines — one ring, two rings, had their distinctive rings. Saskatchewan led the way with SaskTel in eliminating party lines and having dedicated lines to farmyards.

I'm sure members here have separate farm lines for their Internet . . . separate phone lines for their Internet, for their home, and they probably even have a separate phone line to their barn. Well, Mr. Speaker, that is because SaskTel invested in that feature, Mr. Speaker.

Tommy Douglas invested in rural electrification and this government, Mr. Speaker, I think there'll be people looking back from years to come, looking back and saying that was a wise decision to invest in CommunityNet. It gave us a distinct economic advantage for our children, for businesses, for our health practitioners, for our First Nations people. And I think people will look back and say that was a very good idea.

So I'm very pleased to second the motion put forward by the member from Regina Wascana Plains:

That this Assembly encourage the government to continue its leadership in expanding Internet services to schools, communities, and government offices throughout the province by the CommunityNet program.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're talking this evening about CommunityNet — the Internet, Mr. Speaker. The Internet which provides access to people who have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to either own or access a computer to be able to access the Internet because it's not just, Mr. Speaker, the availability of the Internet itself. You need the equipment to be able to access it. So, Mr. Speaker, not everyone is in a position to enjoy the benefits of CommunityNet

or the Internet although it certainly is a benefit, Mr. Speaker, if you can access it.

Part of the problem is . . . and the government is hollering it's for schools. Mr. Speaker, some of the schools have difficulty under this government affording the equipment necessary to be able to access the Internet even though, Mr. Speaker, they have the cable run into their institution. So, Mr. Speaker, it's not just the idea of having a wire plugged into your wall that you need. You need to have all of the other infrastructure in place as well, such as computers that can access it.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the old 8088s or the old 286s you could access, Mr. Speaker, BBSs (bulletin-board service). You could even access the Internet with their use. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is extremely slow. And if a student was going to try to download anything with any graphics involved in it, Mr. Speaker, half of the computers that we have in the schools across Saskatchewan would take their entire study period to download that, Mr. Speaker, because of the underfunding provided by the government opposite.

So, Mr. Speaker, they may brag all they want about providing access to, I believe it's 237 communities, Mr. Speaker, but those same communities need to be able to utilize equipment that they don't have in a lot of cases to access that Internet, Mr. Speaker. So while their numbers sound good, the actual practical sense of that access is very limited, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the use of government funding to provide Internet access, CommunityNet as a social policy, is not necessarily a bad thing. It's not even necessarily a bad thing, Mr. Speaker, because the government opposite thought of it — although there are a lot of things that they do think of and provide that are bad, Mr. Speaker, such as the increased rates on seniors that they're doing with the health care practices, Mr. Speaker. But they're not all bad ideas that come forward from the other side, just as, Mr. Speaker, it's not all bad ideas or all good ideas either, Mr. Speaker, that come from this side.

(20:45)

Mr. Speaker, as a social policy for providing access to communities, it's not necessarily a bad thing. But, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel is not the only provider of Internet services. If you're going to provide public policy, Mr. Speaker, to provide a subsidy, as the member from Saskatoon said, cross-subsidization, if you're going to provide cross-subsidization from the telephone consumer who may or may not have access to the Internet to provide CommunityNet, then why not allow that same subsidy to other providers of Internet access? Why not, Mr. Speaker? If it's a social policy paid for through the collection of dollars by government, why must it be limited to providing that subsidy to one entity? There's no reason other than philosophical, Mr. Speaker.

Other providers provide Internet access. Wireless communications, Mr. Speaker, is the future when it comes to Internet. Image cable right now provides wireless connection. It is provided cheaper, Mr. Speaker, than what SaskTel is talking of providing high-speed access through CommunityNet. And the fact is, Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet comes into your community. If you can't get 200 connections outside of the

schools, outside of the public institutions, outside of government offices, you can be sitting right next to that Internet node and not get access, Mr. Speaker. Not get access.

So the government is saying, oh yes, we're going to provide high-speed access to 237 communities across this province, but only a few of those communities will the individuals and will the businesses have access to high-speed Internet. Only a few of them, Mr. Speaker.

And fact is, I see a sign in Carlyle as I was driving in yesterday morning, trying to get people to sign up so that the community can get high-speed access, Mr. Speaker. And they don't know if they're going to be able to get 200 people to sign up, and that's in a community, Mr. Speaker, of roughly a thousand people. So every fifth person in Carlyle is going to have to buy high-speed Internet. Now if you're the average population in Canada where you have four people to a family, then roughly every family in Carlyle is going to have to buy high-speed Internet so that anybody in Carlyle — outside of the government offices, outside of the school — can access it, Mr. Speaker. And the minister is hollering at me, oh they can still get dial-up. That's right, they can still get dial-up, Mr. Speaker. But then you have to ask, why are they spending all of this money providing high-speed connections into a community where the people can't get access to it?

Let's take a look at a community down the road from Carlyle. Let's look at Arcola, roughly 3 to 400 people. Every second person would have to get a high-speed connection to access in that community, even though they got a school. So, four people . . . you'd have to have two people in every family, Mr. Speaker, with a high-speed connection.

You don't need it. Every household, Mr. Speaker, only needs one connection. You can connect up any number of computers to the one connection, Mr. Speaker. You don't need more than one high-speed connection in your home. But the way the government's got it designed, you can't get it.

You either have 200 people in the community . . . And the community, Mr. Speaker, is not what we think of across rural Saskatchewan. Community across rural Saskatchewan means the town, the village, and the surrounding RM (rural municipality). Well with high-speed connection through CommunityNet, you have a radius out from your node — I'll use miles because I don't remember what it is in kilometres — of roughly three miles, Mr. Speaker. So you draw a circle three miles around that node and that is what you get access to.

So if you're . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . about five kilometres, okay. I took my education in the English system and not in this newfangled Trudeau measurement system.

And computers work in English, Mr. Speaker. They don't work in metric in my household . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, the member from Regina Northwest . . . no, Regina Qu'Appelle, is hollering over there, join the 21st century. Well, Mr. Speaker, the largest Internet user in the world is across our southern border, in English measurement system, in the English measurement system. So maybe the member across should look at who's using the Internet.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at who gets access to the high-speed Internet under the NDP government's favourite CommunityNet program, very few people outside of the larger communities are going to be able to access this program.

So while they may be complaining that Alberta has so many fewer access points, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to actual access by the people I suspect we are going to have a lot less communities that are actually going to be able to access high-speed Internet under the CommunityNet program.

Mr. Speaker, people can access high-speed Internet right now in their communities using Image Cable. Why isn't the government providing the same subsidy to Image Cable? If it's a government social policy to subsidize access to Internet in communities, then why not allow the private sector to access that subsidy as well?

Because they, Mr. Speaker, they would indeed provide that access to businesses, they would provide that access to individuals — whether there was 50 customers or 100 customers. They wouldn't limit themselves, Mr. Speaker, to a minimum of 200 customers. And that's the downside, Mr. Speaker, of this particular measure that the government is bringing forward.

So when you look at a community, Mr. Speaker, and say we have to have a connection of 200 individual hook-ups to provide CommunityNet, a high-speed access to individuals, you say well why don't Saskatchewan communities have enough people to access this?

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been 58 long years since Tommy Douglas was first elected. We had a million people roughly back in 1944 and, Mr. Speaker, under too many years of CCF/NDP government we still have a million people — not quite even.

If the government opposite and their predecessors had put in place economic policies that would grow Saskatchewan, that would allow people like Image Cable to access business to grow this province, Mr. Speaker. All of those communities would already be having access to high-speed Internet because the customer base would be there.

Only under this form of government, Mr. Speaker, where government has to own it all is the economy stagnant. Even in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, even in Manitoba the population is growing. Those communities, Mr. Speaker, are getting access to high-speed Internet. It's only in Saskatchewan that our communities are shrinking . . . are shrinking, Mr. Speaker, under the stifling, economic policies of the members opposite.

So when they talk about providing CommunityNet access very few people are going to get access to the high-speed Internet. And I hear somebody saying over there, when? Maybe it's the Government House Leader whispering over there, when?

Well that's a good question. When are they even going to get access? A number of my communities would like to have access to the high-speed Internet. They're concerned that they're not going to, as individuals, not going to have that access because there's not enough people residing in those

communities any more; the access is so limited that it won't be available to them.

So when is this province going to grow so that all of our communities can have access, Mr. Speaker? That's a good question.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite talked a little bit, the member from Saskatoon Greystone, no . . . Saskatoon Greystone, I believe. No, no, sorry, no, the member from Saskatoon Greystone did not speak — Saskatoon Sutherland, spoke about growing Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Well indeed we do need to grow Saskatchewan. That is how we will all get access to high-speed Internet, Mr. Speaker.

But one of the things that the government is doing that will not grow Saskatchewan is increasing the debt, which is what they're doing under this present budget when they put in high-speed Internet access through CommunityNet programming, Mr. Speaker, through SaskTel, using it to cross-subsidize.

But when you're borrowing the money, Mr. Speaker, to provide that service, when you're borrowing the money to pay the exaggerated dividends that this government is demanding from its Crown corporations, that, Mr. Speaker, does not grow Saskatchewan.

When the debt increases, it's a burden on all of us. It's a burden on the present people living here, the taxpayers, and it's a burden on our future generations, Mr. Speaker, on the children that the members opposite say they're providing CommunityNet for.

The member from Saskatoon Sutherland spoke about the Premier talking about the digital divide. Well, Mr. Speaker, under this government, that divide will continue. Government offices will have access to high-speed Internet, but the business right next door will not have, Mr. Speaker, because there won't be the 200 customers to sign up. The school will have it, Mr. Speaker, but when the student goes home from school, he won't have access to it because they don't have the 200 sign-ups, Mr. Speaker. So they're creating their own digital divide, Mr. Speaker. They're creating their own divide that they were speaking against.

Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that as SaskTel cross-subsidizes CommunityNet, it's every SaskTel customer that's providing the funds to do that, Mr. Speaker, except for the money the government is borrowing.

It's every customer, Mr. Speaker, that's paying for it, but not every customer will get access to it. Those customers who cannot afford the \$50 a month for a high-speed Internet, those customers who cannot afford to buy a computer, Mr. Speaker, will not get it. And those customers, Mr. Speaker, in communities within three miles of the high-speed nodes who cannot get 200 people — individual hookups — to sign up, they won't receive it either, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, if the people of Saskatchewan believe that this is a good use of public policy, a good policy to subsidize access to the Internet in communities, then it should also be a

good policy to provide that access to businesses and to individuals, Mr. Speaker. And it fits public policy, Mr. Speaker. It should also be good public policy then to provide that same support mechanism to those in private industry who wish to provide Internet access — high-speed Internet access — to Saskatchewan communities. Why should it be limited? There are other opportunities, Mr. Speaker, out there.

One of the things that's coming is wireless technology dealing with the Internet. It's here already, Mr. Speaker. And in my discussions, including, Mr. Speaker, discussions with technologically savvy people within SaskTel, they say that that access is not that far away. That they're even ready, Mr. Speaker, to start doing trials to get wireless access — high speed — to individuals, to businesses in communities, Mr. Speaker.

So if we're going through this process of providing hard wire access to communities through CommunityNet, then why not provide, Mr. Speaker, that access to individuals and businesses? Or why not look at providing that access, Mr. Speaker, through wireless? Perhaps at some point in time, whomever the minister would be responsible for this, could provide that information as to what is their expectation of SaskTel providing wireless Internet connections. What would its availability be? What would its costs be? How far in the future would it be?

(21:00)

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of questions dealing with CommunityNet programming. But if it's a good public policy, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier then it should be provided to individuals, businesses, and to other businesses to provide that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to this particular motion dealing with exactly that. The motion would read, Mr. Speaker:

Amend by inserting after the words schools, communities the words business, individuals.

And further add after the words CommunityNet program the following: and provide similar support to private high-speed services who wish to service Saskatchewan communities.

I so move, and seconded by the member from Redberry.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak on this amendment to the motion and the motion. The Internet is a very fundamental part of our society nowadays and it's a growing part of our business community, of our government, and of individual people in society.

We applaud the government for its efforts to connect with rural Saskatchewan, but we have some problems with the original motion. The word leadership is in it. Frankly this government has shown nothing in the way of leadership to put this province back on track. And even worse, it has done nothing to revitalize rural Saskatchewan.

An example of how the amendment to the motion has pointed

out that this government is leaving out some very important sectors and people in the community, namely the business sector, and individuals out of their motion, out of their plans. And again, as the member from Cannington pointed out, that they're not giving any subsidy to any private investors concerning implementing the Internet in Saskatchewan.

This government has not had a very good track record of revitalizing rural Saskatchewan. They've made many announcements. They've talked about it, but they have done nothing to revitalization in Saskatchewan, and as any constituency, rural constituency in the province can note. We can speak about any constituency, but in Redberry Lake constituency, rural revitalization was a non-starter. It has never happened; it's never even began.

And I'd like to point out a few points where it's been a total failure in Redberry Lake constituency. Number one, we don't have basic quality highways for the communities in Redberry Lake constituency. The highway's in such a terrible mess it affects the business community, affects the farming community. It's really a safety hazard in Redberry Lake constituency. So that's the first place where the government has failed.

On the agriculture front, much of the constituency of Redberry Lake, as much of the areas of rural Saskatchewan, is going through a drought, a severe drought. And what has this government done but increased premiums to crop insurance, reduced coverage, eliminated the spot loss . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I'd remind the member that the motion under discussion has a focus of Internet and CommunityNet program, and if he could bring his remarks around to that topic, please.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the point I was getting at, they're talking about revitalization, rural revitalization and how important the Internet is to rural revitalization. And the point I was trying to make is that people in rural Saskatchewan need to be in contact with other businesses, the government, as far as doing business in the province, and this is just another handicap that Saskatchewan rural business have, and they don't . . . and they need to have access to all communication, including the Internet in rural Saskatchewan.

Other areas, Mr. Speaker, is concerning, as the member from Cannington had pointed out, the Internet is not being given to individuals and to businesses in the communities. It's only being given to schools, hospitals, and Indian reservations, and it's very important that these groups are getting it. It's important to the future of our students that the Internet is available in those communities. But I believe that no matter where people live, they should have the same access to technology information as other people in the province and across Canada.

And in fact when it comes to connecting digital economy, we wholeheartedly on this side support the members opposite when they say things like we cannot afford to lag behind other jurisdictions; we must invest today to connect to the future. Unfortunately the members opposite just don't know how to apply that across the board. And as I'd mentioned before, it's absolutely crucial that all sectors, just not one or two, are given

the opportunity to grow growth in the economy in jobs and in health care, and an agriculture centre must not only be encouraged but provided for.

Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet is a six-year \$700 million initiative, and before the members opposite start patting themselves on the back, we have to remind them this is a federal-provincial program. Without federal funding, there is no way this would have become a reality. When it's complete, CommunityNet's intent is to connect nearly 370 communities to government offices, educational institutions, health facilities to high-speed Internet.

What some members don't understand is that some communities in Saskatchewan may not last six years. They may not be around to get the Internet, and that's where we need to talk about rural revitalization and the need to bring that to the forefront.

It's interesting that when members opposite talk about the digital economy, and specifically CommunityNet, one of the first things they mention is how important it is that everyone has access to government services, that all departments, boards, and Crowns get hooked up first. And my point, Mr. Speaker, was before that, the farming community, the business community in Saskatchewan do not and will not have this access to the Internet. And it's very important that they do, so that they can communicate with the departments and government services and other businesses in the country and around the world.

In fact when it initially launched CommunityNet, the members opposite talked about how many opportunities this would provide for SaskTel. And it's interesting how typical this is of this government to have an ulterior motive — helping out one particular Crown.

And from this year's budget document we have had the quote: "CommunityNet is an excellent example of the public sector and a Crown corporation working together." What's wrong with this statement, Mr. Speaker? There's no mention of the private sector. Why isn't the private sector involved? Why weren't they given an opportunity to partner with this extremely important initiative?

And after all we know that the private sector is the engine that drives our economy. It provides the jobs; the private sector is the biggest employer of young people and it stands the most to benefit from the CommunityNet. And students and graduates from schools and universities will undoubtedly begin their careers with the private sector. These are the opportunities that the members opposite just don't seem to get, Mr. Speaker.

CommunityNet is an initiative, one that members on this side of the House feel is not only important but vital to ensure the survival of rural communities, but it's just one of the many initiatives that the members opposite could be talking about to keep Saskatchewan alive.

And as I mentioned other initiatives that the government should focus on is the basic infrastructures of this province — just not CommunityNet — hospitals, roads, schools to encourage businesses into a community. And one of the things that

community needs to supply to businesses and farms is the Internet, but under this program they won't be getting that technology.

And quite simply when you limit involvement to only the public sector and the Crown corporations, then you're also limiting the opportunities and this will have a serious impact on our young people — young people that are desperately needed to help grow Saskatchewan and grow the economy.

The amendment speaks directly to this need of increased private involvement in the economy, and it also speaks to the businesses and the individuals in rural Saskatchewan that need access to the Internet. And once again we see this government only looking at having Crown corporations involved in the delivery of the Internet, and as we've seen with the government's past policies, that this is a very inefficient way of doing it. There's no competition to speak of and they're driving out any private sector or any private involvement in the economy. And this is to the detriment of the province as a whole. And, Mr. Speaker, this is the similar track that this government has been going on and this is not helping the economy of Saskatchewan whatsoever.

What we need is more private investors, more competition in all fields of this province, and we should not limit the Internet just to SaskTel and the people that run SaskTel. And what we have seen in the past is that we do not need an increased role of public sector in the economy. We need to attract private sector.

And again, we see that this initiative in the CommunityNet is driving private businesses away. It's another red flag up to businesses around the world, in other parts of Canada, that private investment is not welcome in this province, and that this government is going in the wrong direction as usual.

I have to go back to the amendment, Mr. Speaker, and speak to how important it is that this Internet, CommunityNet, also be available to businesses and individuals in rural Saskatchewan. And also the government needs to support the private sector with subsidies on a fair, competitive basis as it does with the Crown corporations, and SaskTel in particular, supplying high-speed service.

So at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say, just before in closing, that I will not be supporting the motion but I will be supporting the amendment to the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, you know I rise to, of course, oppose the amendment and support the motion.

Mr. Speaker, here we have a very good news story for the province of Saskatchewan. We're having a good deal with international competition. We have a knowledge explosion in the world with Internet. And all I hear from the old Tories, the Saskatchewan Party, is the same old, negative, hopeless message.

They should be standing up to be proud of their schools who will be having the Internet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(21:15)

Mr. Goulet: — They should be having pride in their hospitals, in having Internet. They should be having pride in their communities that would not normally get the Internet without the support from CommunityNet.

Mr. Speaker, just a bit of an overview, you know, vis-à-vis the structure of the impact in regards to CommunityNet. This is a \$71 million program which will deliver high-speed Internet to communities, not only in the urban centre but north and rural areas. But it also impacts the educational facilities, health facilities, government offices, and also First Nations communities. In total there will be, over the long run, an impact of 366 communities. Now of course, right now, there's about eight communities that are impacted by high-speed Internet. We will be impacting over the long run of this program 366.

Also I would like to mention some of these communities because, while there is very important private sector development in the big cities . . . we see that in Vancouver, Toronto. We see that in our bigger cities in the province, and it's very, very good to have that positive, private sector investment here, it has not reached Cumberland House in northern Saskatchewan. It has not reached Beauval up in Athabasca region. But with this CommunityNet, Beauval and Cumberland House will be part of the CommunityNet process. We will also have Sandy Bay, way up north of Cumberland House. We will also have the member from Athabasca's own community of Ile-a-la-Crosse. We will also have La Loche, Pinehouse. We will have Creighton and La Ronge.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goulet: — I might mention as well that they're not very proud of some of the communities, not only in the North and the fact that we will be receiving Internet for the first time, high-speed Internet for the first time, but also many rural communities . . . and because of time I will just mention a few. There's Big River, Leoville, Loon Lake, Raymore, Shellbrook, Southey, and a lot more have been mentioned before but these are the communities that do not have high-speed Internet will be getting high-speed Internet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goulet: — We also have pride in our universities, our community colleges, our SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) programming that's delivered in many of our rural northern communities. We also have the elementary and high schools. In all we will have 834 educational facilities supported through CommunityNet.

On the health facility side we will have 310, there'll be approximately 250 government offices, and we will also have 86 First Nations schools connected through this tremendous linkage that we'll be having between our public approach vis-à-vis the health side, educational side, and government side.

But we must say that it will support also the private sector development because of its impact to our residences and our

businesses. So we have an important approach of recognizing both our mixed economy approach with the private and public sector.

The member from across was talking about subsidizing one of the companies which was Image Wireless. So I will acknowledge the fact that Image Wireless as a private sector company, which is very important to the province, is here. But they service Yorkton and Regina. They do not service North Battleford, Swift Current. They do not service La Loche. They do not service these areas. So it's very important on CommunityNet that we impact the many other communities in this province.

Also the member only focuses on the private sector company of Image Wireless. And it's very important to recognize that there's also Shaw communications. Shaw communications provides services in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Central Butte, Swift Current, Assiniboia, Bengough, Lafleche, and Rockglen.

There's also an important cooperative in regards to Regina and Access Communications provides high-speed Internet in Regina, Yorkton, Estevan, and Emerald Park. But note, Mr. Speaker, that many of the communities that have been raised by members throughout this province will be impacted by this CommunityNet program, and acknowledged by the members that it is also cost-shared by the federal government which very . . . which is, which they must have something against.

But I think it's very, very important, you know, that the governments work together. If we saw the subsidization like that in health we'd really improve, you know, from 14 cents to 50 cents. That would be a big improvement from the federal level but maybe they're opposed to that as well.

But I would like to say this in regards to the program, on the quality of the program. National broadband task force report says this about the CommunityNet. They say that it is the most advanced undertaking by any comparable national state or provincial government anywhere in the world.

So there it is, the Saskatchewan Party like the old Tories just don't like to look at the good side of this province, they don't. They have to complain and look at the bad side of Internet. Here it is benefiting our students. It's benefiting the seniors and our hospitals in regard to the services that they will get. It's benefiting our businesses. But what do they do? Gloom and doom and complain. It's the same hopeless thing that I heard when I was seeing the Tories in opposition when we came over in government.

The other thing is that the Saskatchewan Party is sometimes called Alberta envy party because they say, all the great things happen in Alberta. Now I would like to do a little bit of a comparison.

And it's interesting Alberta calls their program the SuperNet. And interestingly, very Saskatchewan style, we call ours the CommunityNet. What's the comparison? While they spent money over there from the public sector, they put in 362 million. We put in 71 million. Ours, we impact 237 communities in addition to what we already have. Alberta, 35

communities. The big difference. I'll say that again.

We will be . . . they will be spending 464 million from their public and private money. We will be providing 71 million. We impact 237 communities. They will impact 35 communities. In Alberta, only 35 communities are guaranteed high-speed access. The remaining small rural centres will only receive services if a private-sector company can build a business to pay the rates for accessing SuperNet. This will mean that fewer communities will receive services over time.

And when I look at the aspect of Alberta, one of our members mentioned that we do a great strategy in this province on doing positive partnerships with Aboriginal people. We do that in the forestry sector, the mining sector, and in growing areas on public educational institutions.

We do the partnerships on SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority). But, again, when we do positive partnerships, for example in the question of SIGA, all we hear is about complaints. They have only raised one question on the Aboriginal issue since I've been around this legislature. And they talk about an accountability and SIGA. And I acknowledge it should be raised, but it's not should be raised 100 per cent of the time.

There is important issues on First Nations people in this province on building the economy and positive partnerships there, on the health side development, on the positive partnerships in regards to education, but all that they will look at is the negative side of life.

All they will talk about is the accountability question on SIGA which I said should have been rightfully acknowledged, but not on all the questions that they ask. They did not ask any other questions other than those accountability. But not once will they talk about their old partners. Some of them are old Tories and they will never talk about the accountability of the Tories. They will stay silent . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would remind the member that the topic under discussion relates to Internet and CommunityNet programs. I'm wondering if he would relate his remarks to the motion.

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I was just mentioning the fact of Aboriginal people and our partnership in regards to CommunityNet that we do have in this very, very positive approach of having 86 First Nations schools being part of CommunityNet.

And I would say that I was looking at the rural area commentary and our policy of inclusion, both rural, urban and northern. I would like to look at this report from the rural area. Neil Herland, the reporter, says in regards to Strasbourg:

The local school got high-speed Internet access and it's having a profound affect on students. This physics class used to be taught using books and a black board now science concepts are illustrated by visiting web sites and clicking on animation sequences.

Lorne Gottselig, the teacher said:

Getting high-speed Internet in every school is an excellent idea because it creates a level playing field, you know. What a teacher does in Regina or Saskatoon could be translated over to a teacher that teaches in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good news story. Internet, high-speed Internet, is good for rural areas, good for northern Saskatchewan, good for First Nations communities, good for SaskTel, good for the private sector, good for everybody in this province. And I'm proud to say that indeed I support the motion, vote against the amendment.

And, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to adjourn the debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 21:28.