

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens of northeast Saskatchewan concerned about the condition of Highway No. 23, west from Junction 9 to the town of Weekes. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 23 in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

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

This petition is signed by residents of Porcupine Plain, Nipawin, Greenwater, and Hudson Bay.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand again today to present a petition on behalf of citizens in the Humboldt and . . . Humboldt area, rather, who would like to see their Humboldt territory operations office for Saskatchewan Housing Authority remain in the city of Humboldt. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the proposed closure of the Humboldt territory operations office for Saskatchewan Housing Authority and to renew their commitment to rural Saskatchewan and maintain a full, functioning territory operations office in Humboldt.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the vibrant city of Humboldt, as well as from the communities surrounding Humboldt, which would be Fulda and Carmel.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise again today to present a petition on behalf of people who are concerned about the closure of the Humboldt operations office for the housing authority.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the proposed closure of the Humboldt territory operations office for the Saskatchewan Housing Authority and to renew their commitment to rural Saskatchewan and maintain a full, functional territory operations office in Humboldt.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Annaheim.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon

I'm proud to rise on behalf of people concerned about the high cost of prescription drugs. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

The signatures on this petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are from the great community of Tisdale and I'm happy to present on their behalf.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the deplorable and dangerous condition of Highway 58. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to make necessary repairs to Highway 58 in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals all from the community of Chaplin.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here to improve Highway 42.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highway 42 in the Arm River constituency in order to prevent injury or loss of life and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

In duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Eyebrow, Tugaske, and Brownlee.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from injured workers not covered by WCB (Workers' Compensation Board). Their prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to acknowledge the concerns of the taxpaying citizen by causing the Government of Saskatchewan to ensure that absolute fairness and equitable treatment be given to those injured and disabled people and their families and be diligent in this most urgent matter.

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

Signed by the citizens of Lake Lenore, St. Louis, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today with citizens concerned about the closure

of the Humboldt territory operations office for the Saskatchewan Housing Authority. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the proposed closure of the Humboldt territory operations office for Saskatchewan Housing Authority and to renew their commitment to rural Saskatchewan and maintain a full, functioning territory operations office in Humboldt.

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt and Muenster.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned with the boundaries of the new regional health authorities. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure the best possible health coverage for the communities of Govan, Duval, Strasbourg, and Bulyea by placing those communities in the Regina regional health authority as opposed to the Saskatoon health authority.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the community of Govan.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise in the Assembly to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan concerned with the fishing on Besnard Lake. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Big River, Coronach, Big Beaver, Bengough, Swift Current, and Coronach.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 157 and no. 164.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 70 ask the government the following question:

In 2001 how much did the provincial government provide in funding to West Central Road and Rail Limited; was this funding a loan, a grant, or an equity investment; if it was a loan, what were the terms of the loan; does the provincial government have representation on the board of West Central Road and Rail Limited; and if so, who are they and what is their background?

And also, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet I give notice that I shall on day no. 70 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of the Public Service Commission: what is the current salary range for junior secretaries in the minister's office?

And there's a number of other questions about staff.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 70 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of SPMC: does the Central Vehicle Agency have guidelines for updating and regular replacement of passenger motor vehicles in its fleet? If yes, what are those guidelines?

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 70 ask the government the following question:

To the Agriculture minister: how many cases are currently in the review and appeal process for the farm land property tax rebate program; and further to that, how much money is left outstanding as a result of these cases?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, if I may address another question:

To the Agriculture minister: how many rebate applications were submitted to the farm land property tax rebate program in the year 2001; and further to that, is there any money left in the program for the year 2001 — left to be paid out — and if so, how much?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I see there are a lot of special people in the Assembly here today, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to introduce some of them to you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and all the members of the Assembly a number of guests which are seated in your gallery. They are here to mark United Empire Loyalist Day in Saskatchewan.

The United Empire Loyalists, Mr. Speaker, were given the mark of honour, the Unity of the Empire, by Governor General Dorchester in 1789. They were allowed to pass it on to their descendants as recognition for their loyalty to and service in defending the Crown during the American Revolutionary War.

Among our guests today, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Logan Bjarnason who is president of the Saskatchewan branch of the United

Empire Loyalists of Canada. Mr. Bjarnason is wearing a replica of his ancestor's uniform from Butler's Rangers.

A number of other members are also here in period costumes. Among the other Loyalists joining Mr. Bjarnason and celebrating United Empire Loyalist Day are his wife, Shirley; Gerald Adair of Maryfield, the branch's secretary, and his wife Pat; Doris Taylor of Regina, treasurer, and her husband Clarence; and Lorna MacKenzie, also of Regina, the branch's genealogist, and her husband Ken; Wendell Johnson of Rosetown, past president, and his wife Joan; Nelle Balkwill of Regina, also past president; and Margaret and Roger Nefstead of Outlook.

There's also in attendance, Ms. Linda Smith, Ken Fader, a former colleague from a previous life, Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Lloyd Redick. I would ask all members of the Assembly to give a nice warm welcome to all our guests that have joined us here today from the United Empire Loyalists.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — And, Mr. Speaker, by your leave and leave of the Assembly, once again to you, I am very pleased and it is a privilege for me to introduce to you here today as well Mayor Ken Baker who is here from Lloydminster, Mayor Al Schwinghamer, mayor of Moose Jaw, Mayor Wayne Ray from North Battleford, and Mr. Mike Badham who's the president of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association.

Please help me welcome these gentlemen to our Assembly here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the minister, and on behalf of the official opposition extend a welcome to the individuals who are here representing the United Empire Loyalists.

In that group is a couple from Maryfield, as the minister indicated, Pat and Gerry Adair. I met them as they were coming in the door and I asked Gerry why he didn't have his costume on and his wife said she hadn't made it yet.

But I'd certainly like to welcome all the guests and we wish . . . trust that they'll have an enjoyable day. I believe they're going to Government House later in the day. So again, let's extend a warm welcome to these guests who are representing the United Empire Loyalists.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 32 students in your gallery from the glorious little village of Meath Park, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, these students today are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Travis Wilkinson and Miss Bernice McNair. They have three chaperones with them also, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lloyd Slonski, Mrs. Julie Billay, and Mrs. Suzie Romanuk.

Mr. Speaker, it's not often that I get visitors from a school this . . . down in Regina from so far away, and I would wish that all members of the Assembly to please join me in making the students from Meath Park feel very welcome here today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this honoured Assembly, I'd like to introduce to you 16 members of the Lyndale School. They are students from grade 4 to grade 6, and they are from the Lyndale School in Oungre, Saskatchewan, and that is at the very western part of my constituency.

And I've already met with the students and we've had our photo taken and I enjoyed the visit we had very much. And I hope they enjoy the proceedings this afternoon and the rest of the day in Regina. And I also hope that they have a very safe trip home.

And these students are accompanied by their teacher, Marlene Santer, and chaperones, Bernie Persson, Lyn Johnson, and Angie Oshust.

I thank you very much. Please join me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce, I think which is the entire east gallery, who are here from the Tisdale Elementary School. There's 72 students and their parents and chaperones coming from three classrooms in the Tisdale Elementary School. They're Mrs. McRae and her class and parents of rooms 401 and 501; Mrs. Ratushniak and class and parents from Room 502; and Ms. Martinson and class and parents from room 503.

They're here today on a field trip to visit to Regina and its particularly prideful for me to introduce them to the Legislative Assembly and welcome to Regina. And I'd ask all members to join with me in welcoming them here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery, and I'd ask her to stand, is Ms. Patrina Friedle. Patrina has been a key member of the committee organizing the National Aboriginal Day celebrations which are to take place on Friday.

And it is her hope that all members will participate in the celebrations in Wascana Park on Friday, and that all citizens of the province will join in the celebrations of National Aboriginal Day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the minister's welcome to the mayors, I too would like to welcome the mayors here this afternoon, and in particular Mayor Ken Baker from my hometown of Lloydminster. And accompanying Mayor Baker is Moe Aschenbrenner, sitting in your gallery, Mr.

Speaker. Could we give them a welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are four guests sitting in your gallery that I would like to introduce to all the members. First of all, I would like to introduce the mayor of Kyle, Ansgar Tynning, and his wife, Norma. And if they would please stand so everyone can see them.

The other two people that I take great pleasure in introducing are Bodil Egset and Annelaug Stundal. They are visiting us from Norway. They are guests and friends of the Tynnings, and we in the Assembly hope that they enjoy the proceedings, that they get a feel for the province of Saskatchewan, particularly our visitors from Norway. And we just welcome you very warmly to our Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's entirely appropriate that I should follow up the member from Rosetown-Biggar with the appropriate greeting to our friends from Norway. And I would like to say:

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Norwegian.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

United Empire Loyalist Day

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to recognize United Empire Loyalist Day in Saskatchewan. This is a day in which we recognize the fact that roughly 4 million Canadians, or about one in six, can trace their ancestry back to the United Empire Loyalists, those brave individuals who remained loyal to the Crown and came to Canada rather than participate in the Revolutionary War. I am one of those 4 million, Mr. Speaker, and proud of it.

Our ancestors brought with them many of the values which are still the taproot of our Canadian society today — our respect for diversity, our belief in peaceful rather than violent change, our balance of individual rights with collective responsibility; and encompassing them all, our system of parliamentary democracy which, for all its flaws, remains the best in the world.

I think it is important to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that the original Loyalists were not just British. They included liberated slaves, Mohawk First Nations, German, Dutch, Scotch, and Irish colonists. Our multicultural society starts there, and as the United Empire Loyalists descendants settled across Canada, including many in Saskatchewan, they carried with them the values which I mentioned.

On a personal note, last year one of our United Empire Loyalist guests was my friend Betty Caldwell, who has since passed away. Betty and I often sat together in church and one day she told me how her ancestors had sold my ancestors a piece of land in the Kingston-Napanee area. Mr. Speaker, she would have been pleased with this tradition that we have established on

June 19.

Every person, every family, every group that comes to Canada enriches us, strengthens the communities upon which our nation continues to grow. This is certainly true of the United Empire Loyalists, and I am proud to honour them on this day, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker and members, more athletes from my constituency are being inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame.

The 1989 national junior fastball champions, Melfort Cheyenne Chev-Olds 222s, are being recognized for their achievements in the national baseball world. The team started their journey in 1984, when it won the Western Canadian Bantam Championship. The boys went on to win third spot in the 1995 National Midget Event and the National Midget Crown in 1996. The coach, Doug Holoien, attributes their success to the young guys' commitment. He said:

These kids go out on practices. They didn't want a night off. If they didn't play, they wanted to practise and they played hard in their practice.

The kids in turn attribute their success to their coach. Keith Mackintosh said his teammates were committed, but Doug Holoien deserved all the credit, and was the best coach he ever played for. Keith remembers the players waiting for Doug to get off work so they could practise together, and at times Doug hit ground balls to them until his hands were bleeding. Softball Saskatchewan and Softball Canada also recognized Doug as Coach of the Year at the end of 1989.

Mr. Speaker, and members of the House, the members of my constituency were, and still are, extremely proud of these athletes, and it is my pleasure to ask you to join us in congratulating our home team.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Good News from Stats Canada

Mr. Addley: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the rains have come; the sun is now shining; 11,000 more people working in Saskatchewan; the kids are just about out of school and ready to hit the road on vacation with their families — the well-paved roads, I might add. If that's not enough good news to bless us all, then our completely objective friends at Stats Canada has given us one more reason to smile.

So hold on to all three corners of your hat, Mr. Speaker, there's more good news for Saskatchewan. Manufacturing shipments jumped 11.2 per cent in Saskatchewan from March to April — the largest increase in all the provinces. Shipments, or the amount of sales by manufacturers, improved to \$638 million in April.

And as we've said before, we don't look over our shoulder at

other provinces to judge our performance the way some in this Assembly might; but were we to compare, we would see that Alberta increased by a mere 2.3 per cent.

The largest improvements came in wood, food, and chemicals. Also there's good news from farm implement manufacturers, who are quite busy and confident of having a good year. One more piece of good news, according to Kent Smith-Windsor of the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, is that manufacturing firms are expanding into the US (United States) and being quite successful.

There you have it, Mr. Speaker, the straight goods from Stats Canada by way of *The StarPhoenix* and *Leader-Post*, courtesy of good management and sound policy of the optimistic members on this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Linda Hryciw Receives Principal Appreciation Award

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform our Hon. Assembly of an incredible accomplishment by one of Saskatchewan's outstanding professionals.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers lies the community of Meath Park, a community, Mr. Speaker, that those of us who live nearby have always believed to contain the best kindergarten to grade 12 school anywhere. Well, Mr. Speaker, as it turns out, we may be right. The Saskatchewan Association of School Councils, at its annual meeting in Saskatoon, has honoured Meath Park's principal, Linda Hryciw, as their first annual winner of their Principal Appreciation Award.

Mr. Speaker, I've had many opportunities to witness first-hand the enthusiasm and dedication Ms. Hryciw brings to Meath Park School in her desire to have the best kindergarten to grade 12 school. Chair of the Meath Park local board, Wendy Grubbe, states Ms. Hryciw not only wants students to feel good at Meath Park School, but also that they do well.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Hryciw's success in developing a participation school model including parents, community, and school is leading the way in raising good citizens for our ever changing society. Mr. Speaker, the genuine caring and high expectations Ms. Hryciw places upon herself, staff, and students have earned her this very prestigious award.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in congratulating Linda Hryciw for her excellence in contributions to the success of Meath Park School.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina Sound Stage

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last few days in this House, we've heard from the member from Wood River how the Regina sound stage is this huge liability. Counter to this though, Mr. Speaker, I have a Sask Party press release

dated July 27, 2001 in which the member from Kelvington-Wadena identified construction of a state-of-the-art sound stage as, quote:

One of the key ingredients for the successful development of Saskatchewan's film industry.

Another key ingredient: the continuation of the film and video tax credit, which this government has done just as this government, in partnership with the city and the federal government, has now built the sound stage.

Mr. Speaker, to whom should we throw our support in this titanic battle of who speaks for culture in the Saskatchewan Party? I don't know about you, but my money is on the movie critic from Wadena, for I think she's recognized that one of the key ingredients of a successful film industry is the sound stage — something that has been done by this government.

You'll note, Mr. Speaker, that the proof was in the pudding this morning as Kevin DeWalt of Mind's Eye Pictures made a preliminary announcement of a \$3.3 million film to be shot entirely in Saskatchewan with the interior shots and production moving into the new sound stage.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCall: — One thing's for sure, Mr. Speaker. For the Regina sound stage and for this exciting development, two resounding thumbs up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Achak Training Course

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Achak is a Cree word that means spirit. But Achak is also a privately held First Nations-owned corporation that is providing an introductory Aboriginal awareness Web-based training course that will assist organizations with their cross-cultural training needs.

Mr. Speaker, Achak's representative workforce, including Aboriginal peoples course, has been officially launched on May 16. And I had the privilege of attending the official opening ceremonies for Achak this past Friday in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, Eileen Gelowitz is the president and the driving force behind Achak and its exciting new initiative.

The course is composed of five modules. They are: no. 1, our changing workforce; no. 2, Indian and Métis history review; no. 3, frequently asked questions; no. 4, workplace strategies and partnerships; and no. 5, workplace interaction.

The course takes about two and a half to three hours to complete and I am pleased to announce that I'm a graduate of the course and found it very worthwhile.

I would encourage other members to check into the course if they haven't already taken it, and also join me in wishing Eileen Gelowitz and Achak all the best in this endeavour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Federal Financial Assistance for Agriculture

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Details are now emerging about the federal farm package to be announced tomorrow. But there are conflicting reports as to whether this is new money or whether it's simply a repackaging of existing money.

The only thing that we know for sure so far is that it is not a trade injury payment. And Ottawa also says they expect the provinces to pick up 40 per cent of the bill. Mr. Speaker, none of this is good news for Saskatchewan.

Can the Premier give the House and the people of Saskatchewan any more details on the package? Specifically, is the \$5.2 million new money or is it simply a repackaging of existing money — the \$5.2 billion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I am hesitant to speak on behalf of the federal government, but my understanding of the package — it's been described — is that a portion of this package is in fact existing dollars, a carry-through of about \$1.1 billion on an annual basis, and there is new money that should be described as trade injury money.

It is around this package of new money that's to meet the trade injury, occasioned by the European and the American subsidies, that we hold to the position — and I appreciate the support of the Leader of the Opposition on this point — we hold to the position that this money should be 100 per cent new money funded by Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the Premier's had more than just a rough briefing on this package especially if the federal government has the nerve to think that we should also be paying for part of this package. You would think the Premier knew exactly what the federal government had in mind. He would know exactly how much new money is involved, how much old, existing money is involved.

Mr. Speaker, another question to the Premier and perhaps he can answer this one: what . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. Order. Order. Order. Order, please. Order. Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition may start over if he wishes.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we would think that the Premier and the Agriculture minister would know every detail of this package, particularly if the federal government has the nerve to think that we should be paying 40 per cent of it.

Mr. Speaker, has the Premier received any briefing on this? Can he tell us: what will Saskatchewan's share of the program be; how would this money be paid out; when would it be paid out; and will it be set up in a way that truly helps Saskatchewan this time? He better know the answer to those questions.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Here we are, here we are, Mr. Speaker, trying to deal with a extremely serious issue facing Canadian farmers and Saskatchewan farm families, and we get the theatrics from the Leader of the Opposition.

The fact of the matter is no provincial government knows the detail of this plan — no provincial government.

And secondly, Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Agriculture will be leading the ministers of Agriculture of Canada in sitting down next week in Halifax to deal with just these questions. The questions of detail are important, Mr. Speaker. And he is going there with the support of this Premier, with the support of premiers across Western Canada, with the support of Western Canadian producers, to say that in the matter of trade injury this needs to be 100 per cent federal, new dollars.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, how is it the Premier thinks that he should know anything about this when it appears that even Terry Hildebrandt of APAS (Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan) has more briefing on this package than the Premier of Saskatchewan has on the same program.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party remains fully in support of a trade injury payment 100 per cent funded by the federal government. But unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Premier has been losing that argument.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking. The announcement is going to be made tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are sitting on the edges of their chairs all across this province waiting to find out what the answer will be. They expected the Premier had a hand in putting that together.

Mr. Speaker, if in fact the rumours are true and Saskatchewan is expected to pay 40 per cent of this, how is the Premier going to change the federal government's mind?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, it has been my assumption to date — and I hold to that assumption and I hope I can hold to that assumption — that when I speak to this issue on the national stage that I'm speaking also for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I spent this . . . I spent a good chunk of this morning at the Farm Progress Show and a good bit of that time speaking to the national media about this issue. We are not bending on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Leader of the Opposition suggests perhaps there are, perhaps there are more persuasive things that he might want to do. I invite him to move ahead. I invite him. I invite him to seek

a minister with the . . . a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, federal — see if he can get it. I invite him to seek a minister . . . a meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada. I invite him to do it. And if he can and if he can move them, I'll tell you, we're right behind him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, it is becoming so obvious that our Premier is completely in the dark on this issue. How would we know if he's bending if we can't see him? We don't know where he stands on this.

Mr. Speaker, the announcement is going to be made tomorrow. We just saw Mr. Vanclief, the federal Agriculture minister, say that he's going to release the details. It's going to be cast in stone after tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, the Premier still says that he's going to negotiate a better deal.

So how is he going to do this? How is he going to convince the other provinces to stand with him? How is he going to convince the federal government that they need to fund this program 100 per cent fully and that there needs to be a trade injury payment? How is he going to do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The Leader of the Opposition says that he does not know my position on this matter. Well he must be the only one of 30 million Canadians that doesn't. I don't know where he's been.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition by inference suggests that he would be very effective on this file. I have a clipping here from *The Hill Times*, Canada's parliamentary newsletter, where several years ago the Leader of the Opposition went to Ottawa on behalf of Saskatchewan producers. Here's what it says, quote, Mr. Speaker:

Handshake for you. Saskatchewan Party leader and former Reform MP Elwin Hermanson was back on the Hill last week trying to drum up support for an aid package for Saskatchewan farmers. The former Reform Agriculture critic met with opposition critics, but he could not swing a sit down with the Agriculture minister, Lyle Vanclief.

Quote, he said:

"I used to be friends with Lyle when he chaired the Agriculture committee in the last parliament," said Mr. Hermanson, adding that this time he only got a handshake.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, we need more than a handshake from the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, while as Leader of the Opposition, and without a support of provincial government whose Agriculture minister was in Mexico suntanning, at least the official opposition was using all the powers at their disposal to do something for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — This government is ineffective. They have all the levers of government to pull. How can the Premier stand up in this House and face the people of Saskatchewan, the farm communities of Saskatchewan, when he has failed in every instance in regarding this injury payment program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, here is the Leader of the Opposition's definition of failure. About one year ago, thereabouts, I took the office of Premier. About 10 months ago, on behalf of Canadian premiers, I picked up the file to speak on behalf of the premiers of Canada around the need for trade injury payment and the support of Canadian farmers.

Three months ago, the federal minister of Agriculture — who once in a while gives a handshake to the Leader of the Opposition — that federal minister was saying three months ago there would not be one more thin dime, not one more thin dime for Canadian producers. All the money was out in existing process. That was three months ago.

Mr. Speaker, we have moved that federal government from a position of zero to a position today of \$5.2 billion, we think. Mr. Speaker, it's not enough but it's a lot more progress than he, the Leader of the Opposition, or anybody over there has ever achieved for Canadian producers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Settlement with John Popowich

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. In 1992, Mr. Speaker, Saskatoon police officer, John Popowich, was charged with sexually assaulting children at a Martensville daycare centre. In 1993, a judge found Mr. Popowich not guilty. In 1994 the Mr. Popowich sued the NDP's (New Democratic Party) Justice minister and his prosecutors for malicious prosecution. After fighting the lawsuit for eight years, a judge told the government that if the case went to trial the Justice minister and his prosecutors would almost certainly be found guilty of malicious prosecution.

So yesterday the NDP agreed to settle with Mr. Popowich by paying him \$1.3 million. And then the minister chalked up the whole thing to an honest mistake.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister clarify his statement? Were Justice department officials guilty of an honest mistake due to lack of judgment, or were they guilty of malicious prosecution in the case of John Popowich?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan yesterday admitted to Mr. Popowich that mistakes had been made, and apologized to him and offered compensation which he agreed to.

This is not an easy matter, as the member will know. It's a situation which as a result of actions of prosecutors, Mr.

Popowich was caused untold grief from which he still suffers today.

The prosecutors at that time, Mr. Speaker, used the judgment . . . used the information they had available about child witnesses and child sexual abuse cases. With the use of their best judgment, Mr. Speaker, they concluded that a prosecution was warranted. As it turns out, that was not the case, Mr. Speaker, and that is why the settlement took place today.

And it's appropriate for me, I think on behalf of everyone, to indicate to Mr. Popowich our sincere regrets and our apology. And I'll be meeting with him and his family shortly to convey that to him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll note that the question was not answered.

Mr. Speaker, the minister admitted yesterday to reporters that if the Popowich case went to trial the government would be forced to pay an even higher award to Mr. Popowich than \$1.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, the courts don't order multi-million-dollar awards because of an honest mistake or a lack of judgment. Malicious prosecution is an extremely serious offence. It means that Justice department officials acted maliciously in fraud of their duties. And according to the Supreme Court of Canada, in order to prove malicious prosecution there must be an absence of reasonable and probable cause for charges to be laid, and prosecutors must have acted with improper motives that abused or perverted the justice system.

Mr. Speaker, how can the minister call this an honest mistake when a judge said there was strong evidence of Crown prosecutors abusing and perverting the justice system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, in the pretrial discussions with Mr. Justice Baynton it became clear that it was likely that the Government of Saskatchewan would be responsible for malicious prosecution. And that is why the settlement took place.

Settlements take place all the time as the member will know, in order to resolve matters in the best interests of the parties concerned. Mr. Popowich, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and as the member will know, has said this is the end of the matter for him. I think we should listen to what he says.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thankfully Mr. Popowich's situation is over after about eight to ten years. But this minister still must take responsibility for what happened during that time.

Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada clearly considers malicious prosecution as a very serious matter. That's why the court has set the threshold of proof so high, Mr. Speaker.

According to the 1989 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Nelles v. Ontario*, I quote, Mr. Speaker:

. . . malicious prosecution requires not only proof of an absence of reasonable and probable cause for commencing the proceedings but also proof of an improper purpose or a motive . . . that involves an abuse or perversion of the (justice) system of criminal justice for ends it was not designed to serve . . .

Mr. Speaker, the Justice minister has all but admitted that his department officials were guilty of malicious prosecution in the Popowich case, which according to the Supreme Court of Canada is when, and I quote, "the prosecutor acts maliciously in fraud of his duties," Mr. Speaker.

Guilty of pursuing charges against Mr. Popowich with motives that abused or perverted the justice system in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, what specific actions is the NDP government taking to ensure this kind of incompetence, fraud, and abuse by government officials against innocent citizens never happens again?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member that the prosecution's department deals with 84,000 inquiries a year, 18,000 of which go to prosecution. Mr. Speaker, this is a job which requires judgment on a day-to-day basis, and in which in the vast majority of cases, the overwhelming majority of cases, that judgment is unquestioned.

Mr. Speaker, in the last 10 years there have been five cases in which these issues have arisen, Mr. Speaker. So I think we need to keep it in that context.

(14:15)

But let me just say this, that with the information available at the time, Mr. Speaker, two prosecutors responded in accordance with their best judgment, Mr. Speaker. We have accepted the responsibility for those errors, Mr. Speaker, and we have responded with this apology and with this settlement, Mr. Speaker. Nobody is very happy with this situation, Mr. Speaker. We have taken steps to ensure that this will not happen again. And the member will know that instances of this have not taken place in the province since.

There is education seminars and a whole range of things, Mr. Speaker, which have clarified the protocol so that we now do things in a way which is appropriate with the knowledge we now have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — There may have been, Mr. Speaker, thousands of cases in this province that have gone through quietly. This however is a case of national pre-eminence. Also this is one of the very few cases where malicious prosecution has taken place. And that puts it into a totally different category and should not be confused with all the other thousands of cases in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government must take full responsibility for the massive abuse that took place in the malicious prosecution of John Popowich. Mr. Popowich has suffered, his family has suffered, the taxpayers have suffered, and the public confidence in the justice system has been very severely undermined.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government incompetence and a track record of legal bungling and abuse has led to the loss of faith by Saskatchewan people in the NDP's justice system, and that is unacceptable.

Will the minister immediately establish an independent public inquiry into how the justice system was allowed to maliciously prosecute John Popowich, and destroy his life, and cost the taxpayers \$1.3 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member will know, I never rule anything out. But it looks like it is — to me — that it is not necessary at this stage to respond in that way. But I am of course always open to considering these matters in the very near future.

I would add though, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Popowich himself does not want an inquiry. And I think we've put Mr. Popowich through enough and we should listen to what he says, we should take his advice, and respect his wishes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Because of this government's incompetence, Mr. Speaker, the issue has now become public confidence in the legal system of Saskatchewan. That's what we're dealing with today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, John Popowich has paid a heavy price for the NDP government's incompetent management of the justice system. The taxpayers have paid a heavy price for the NDP's incompetence. And yet the NDP apparently is not interested in getting to the bottom of how Saskatchewan's justice system has gone so wrong.

The Justice officials responsible for the malicious prosecution of Mr. Popowich 10 years ago are still prosecuting cases for the government, and the minister wants to chalk the whole thing up to an honest mistake and just move on.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's just not good enough. Will the Justice minister immediately establish an independent public inquiry into the malicious prosecution of John Popowich so the public understands what went wrong and so this kind of government abuse is never allowed to be inflicted on innocent citizens and taxpayers again, so that we can all start to rebuilt trust in Saskatchewan's justice system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member, for what it's worth, that we have taken every step to ensure that that this will not happen again. Province . . . across the country, and indeed across North America and around the

world, these situations arose in the early 1990s, as the member will know. There was a peculiar set of circumstances which led to that situation here as well as in other places.

The protocols have been changed, Mr. Speaker. There's been a whole lot of education and work done with prosecutors, Mr. Speaker. We now know a lot more about how to deal with child witnesses in child sexual abuse cases of this sort.

We have victim service fund programs designated specifically to dealing with these questions, Mr. Speaker. And I want to assure the member that every step has been taken to ensure that the kind of situation that arose in 1992 and has not arisen since, will not arise again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nursing Shortages

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday the Canadian Institute of Health Information released a report indicating that the number of registered nurses in our Saskatchewan health system is declining and that the average age of RNs (registered nurse) working in the system is also increasing.

The report echoes the information provided by the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses earlier this year that indicated 500 nurses had left our system last year alone, and that Saskatchewan had lost almost 1,200 nurses since 1999.

In fact the report indicates Saskatchewan's decline in nursing numbers is almost three times the national average decrease.

Mr. Speaker, these are discouraging trends but the NDP government has known about this for several years because we've raised it time after time after time.

Mr. Speaker, why has the NDP government failed so miserably in keeping their promises to increase the number of nurses working in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, sounds like they found the double dose of lemons in the back room today.

But what . . . Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the members opposite, and to the people of Saskatchewan, is that we have been involved in working with the profession to make sure that we are prepared for the future. But there are a couple of pieces of information which I think all members would like to hear.

One of the things is that Saskatchewan, in the same information that the member opposite is referring to, has 80.8 nurses per 10,000 population. That's higher than the Canadian average of 74.3 and it continues to be above the national average like it has for many numbers of years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The point is, Mr. Speaker, that we have a challenge right across the whole country. If you looked at the

headlines on every paper in the country today, this is an issue and we're . . . It's the same issue in the United States. We are working at it together with our profession to make sure we're ready for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the nurses that are working overtime, the nurses that are working to the point of exhaustion, they understand that this government's record is three times worse than the national average.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — And, Mr. Speaker, for those working nurses in the field that are overworked, they'll be pleased to hear the minister answer by making cynical jokes about lemons, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not only . . . Not only, Mr. Speaker, are we performing and losing nurses at a rate three times greater than the Canadian average, our nurses are older than the Canadian average. In fact 4,000 of our nurses will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 years, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the rate we're going where we're losing nurses each and every year, how in the world is this government and its failed policy going to meet the demands of the next 10 years when those aging nurses reach retirement age?

Mr. Speaker, if every single graduate of every single university program, and every single one of them stayed in Saskatchewan, we'll come far short of what we need for the future in this province. Why is the government ignoring that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I've outlined previously the many things that we are doing to increase our training, to work with bursaries. This year we are training 260 RNs; next year it will be 300. And we're working together with the Minister of Learning. We are continuing to do all of the things that we need in that particular area.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that the members opposite do not tell us what they will do on health care. They have said nothing since 1999 when they were going to do an audit and they were going to stay at zero increase in funds. That will not work in health care in Canada.

What we need is to work together around the kind of action plan that we've set out for health in Saskatchewan so that we can have all of the professionals working together to provide the kind of care that we need for our people in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 208 — The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 2002 (Appointment of Directors)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading of Bill No. 208, The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 2002 (Appointment of Directors).

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

Bill No. 211 — The Accountability of Crown Entities Act

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading of Bill No. 211, The Accountability of Crown Entities Act.

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

Bill No. 212 — The Crown Corporations Disclosure Act

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 212, The Crown Corporations Disclosure Act.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today on behalf of the government to convert for debates returnable questions no. 354 and 355.

The Speaker: — Questions 354 and 355 converted to motions for return (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 75 — The Cities Act

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 75, The Cities Act. The Cities Act presents to all of us a significant opportunity to advance and strengthen our cities and to create opportunities for more effective local government.

As many members will know, the initial momentum for this legislation primarily came from the cities themselves. I want to commend the proactive approach taken by the cities toward advancing the current provincial/municipal relationship by putting forward proposals to revitalize and strengthen the governance of our cities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to especially thank the city mayors and acknowledge each of them here today in my presentation: Mr. Tim Perry, the mayor of Estevan; Mr. Dennis Korte, the mayor of Humboldt; Mr. Ken Baker, the mayor of Lloydminster; Mr. Delmond Henderson, the mayor of Melfort; Mr. Mike Fisher, the mayor of Melville; Mr. Al Schwinghamer, the mayor of Moose Jaw; Mr. Wayne Ray, the mayor of North Battleford; Mr. Don Cody, the mayor of Prince Albert; Mr. Pat Fiocco, the mayor of Regina; Mr. James Maddin, the mayor of Saskatoon, Mr. Paul Elder, mayor of Swift Current, Mr. Don

Schlusser, mayor of Weyburn, and Mr. Phil Devos, mayor of Yorkton.

(14:30)

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, that our respective officials have been able to work together to prepare The Cities Act. Jointly we've been able to lay the legislative foundation necessary to increase the autonomy of municipalities and to reflect the principles advocated by the cities, while meeting the objectives of this great province of ours.

I particularly want to commend the work of Theresa Dust and Merrilee Rasmussen, on behalf of the cities, and the officials from my own department, Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs, and their colleagues in the Department of Justice.

Within a very short period of time they transformed the cities' proposals into significant new legislation now before our legislature. Mr. Speaker, the province is very much committed to increasing municipal autonomy, and reducing provincial involvement in the governance of our cities where there is no overriding provincial interest.

We recognize that Saskatchewan's city governments are in the best position to make local decisions for the benefit of their residents. The Cities Act is a further extension and recognition of this commitment, and Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out some of the things that this city Act will do.

It will modernize the relationship between the province and the cities. It will enable city governments to encourage initiative and creativity, and it will provide citizens with better, more accountable local government.

Mr. Speaker, the Act introduces the principles of natural person powers and areas of jurisdiction, while at the same time incorporating important elements of our current urban legislation.

Natural person powers will provide municipalities with the same legal powers as individuals or businesses and will enable a city to administer its corporate affairs with more flexibility.

Areas of jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, will provide cities with more flexibility to govern, regulate, license, and deal with a variety of local matters and future issues within municipal jurisdiction as they arise.

Mr. Speaker, The Cities Act also contains a clear statement of principle and municipal purpose. These sections help to define the new relationship between the province, the cities, and their residents in more meaningful ways. And this statement of principles and municipal purposes forms the basis of a new approach to city governments' accountability.

More specifically, as we strengthen the authority and flexibility of the city governments, Mr. Speaker, we are taking steps to ensure that cities are more accountable to their residents and taxpayers as opposed to being held accountable to the provincial government. In this vein — accountability to citizens — The Cities Act contains a number of measures that improve

the accountability and transparency of city governments to the public and to ratepayers.

Seven such measures are: first, a requirement for cities to establish an independent review body to investigate and report on administrative matters that are of concern to residents and ratepayers.

Second, a simplified appeal process to provide a less onerous, a less intimidating process for persons who appeal their assessment without the aid of lawyers or appeal agents.

Third, a requirement for councils to pass a public notice policy setting out the types of notice that the residents are entitled to receive before their city councils make certain decisions. This policy must be in place within 30 days of a city coming under this new Act.

Fourth, requirements for public notice before a city council establishes an investment or purchasing policy, borrows or lends money, moves capital funds to operating, sets remuneration for council members, and sells land below market value.

Fifth, annual requirement for cities to publicize their debt and debt limit along with their financial statements and auditor's report.

Sixth, a greater transparency related to utility pricing and investment strategy.

And the seventh, more transparent rules regarding when a city council or council committee can meet in camera or close a meeting to the public. These and other measures will ensure that cities continue to be accountable to the people who elect them by encouraging and enabling public participation in the governance process.

With respect to property assessment and taxation, Mr. Speaker, The Cities Act has essentially the same provisions as the other municipal Acts with a couple of exceptions. The Act provides cities with expanded authorities to raise revenues by levying additional special taxes on property to pay for a specific service or purpose that can be completed and that affected properties can pay for in one year.

The Cities Act also contains a simplified assessment appeal process that owners may choose to use for all single family residences regardless of the assessment value and for any other property whose assessed value is under \$250,000. We have included an opting-in provision in the legislation that requires a city council to pass a resolution to bring the city within the ambit of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this opting-in provision is important as it gives each city council the ability to decide when it is ready to come under this Act. The new Act requires significant local government administrative capacity. And not all of our cities may be ready at the same time. Councils will be able to make this choice about what they feel is best for their residents. The authority to supplement the Act with regulations has been included in a number of areas so that public interests may be protected if need be and local governments are accountable.

These will be prepared over the coming months in consultation with the cities, prior to the proclamation of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, The Cities Act is a significant piece of legislation that brings a fundamental change to province/city relationships. In this vein we think that some of the principles of this legislation can also strengthen other municipal governments. I encourage other municipalities — urban, northern, and rural — to look at this new legislation to determine whether aspects of the Act may be made applicable to them.

Our cities, Mr. Speaker, have much to offer in terms of social, cultural, and economic development for this great province of Saskatchewan. We have listened to city officials' requests to modernize the legislation they are governed by.

And, Mr. Speaker, accordingly, I'm proud to move second reading of Bill No. 75 — The Cities Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to offer a few remarks with respect to this Bill, Mr. Speaker, to Bill No. 75 and then subsequently to Bill 76 which is related.

We just want to say, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the opposition that we appreciate the fact the government has brought forward this Bill in this session. And we support the initiative of this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — We have also met with the cities, we have met with the city mayors, and we understand the need for this particular piece of legislation. That being said, Mr. Speaker, there's a commitment on this side of the House to deal with this legislation in a quick manner.

But that being said, there are members on this side of the Assembly — there may be members on the government side — that wish to become involved in this discussion before it is moved quickly to Committee of the Whole.

You know, from my perspective, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that my first awareness of the desire on the part of Saskatchewan cities to have this kind of legislation came when I was employed by the city of Swift Current. And the city council in Swift Current made it pretty clear that this is the direction that they wanted the province to move in.

And I recall, Mr. Speaker, that on one occasion when the city of Swift Current hosted the city mayors and commissioners/managers in Swift Current, the management team at the city was involved in helping to organize that and attending the functions. And the arguments that were made by the cities for this was pretty clear.

And let's be very straightforward with respect to what's happened here. This is an excellent example of the cities of this province who have really carried this issue from beginning to end.

They developed the concept for the modernization of their own legislation. They fleshed out exactly what they thought that new legislation should say. They went to the extent of drafting a Bill, Mr. Speaker, and I think it forms much of the basis of what is presented here. There are some changes — we understand that.

And of course the natural person powers represented in this Bill and the delivery of those to municipalities should the Bill . . . should the government proclaim it immediately after it's passed, or when they do, is essential in terms of what the cities were striving for in the province of Saskatchewan.

It does strengthen their authority. And so it should, Mr. Speaker. So should this body do exactly that. In fact many would say, and I would include myself among them, many would say that it is past time, past due that we would make these changes in this province.

It is this level of government, this local level of government that deserves to have its authority strengthened more than any other level of government, Mr. Speaker. This is the level of government that has been the best fiscal stewards of the . . . of the public purse. This is the level of government that has balanced its books — that must balance its books. This is the level of government that doesn't use free votes more often as though . . . as we would even like to see us take in terms of a small step in this legislature; they but use them all the time. That's the function, of course, of local councils.

This level of government more than any other deserves to have its authority strengthened, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, the opposition congratulates the government for introducing this Bill this session. We were hearing — and granted, it was perhaps mostly rumour; obviously things have changed over on the other side — but we were hearing that potentially we wouldn't see this Bill this session, that there was more work to be done.

But the minister has gone ahead and introduced it in this session so that it can be dealt with and passed this session and, for that, we are supportive.

And with those brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will move that we, at this time, adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 76 — The Cities Consequential Amendment Act,
2002/Loi de 2002 apportant des modifications
corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Cities Act**

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, passage of The Cities Act will require some consequential amendments to existing bilingual Bills. Therefore, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 76, The Cities Act Consequential Amendments Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want this Bill. It makes a lot of sense, Mr. Speaker, for this Bill, No. 76, obviously to travel with Bill 75 through the legislative process. And as a result, we will also be adjourning debate, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

(14:45)

**Bill No. 77 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation
Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2)/Loi de 2002
modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation
des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard**

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to speak to Bill No. 77, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2).

This Bill amends The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997 which is the unproclaimed bilingual version of the current Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 77 is the bilingual version of Bill No. 48, which I spoke to in this House on May 22. Just as a reminder, Bill No. 48 introduces a number of initiatives which will, first of all, enhance the Liquor and Gaming Authority's accountability as a regulator.

Next it will improve business and administrative practices related to liquor permits. It will also enhance the authority's legislative basis for action in its role as distributor and regulator of the liquor and gaming industries in the province. And it will support the authority's role in promoting the socially responsible use of liquor and gaming products.

Bill 77 contains the same amendments and regulatory provisions and has the same intent. Mr. Speaker, I hereby move that Bill No. 77, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2) be now read a second time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the minister's comments where he said that Bill 77 was simply a French translation of Bill No. 48.

If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, I have to look at the Bill and wonder why is there English in the Bill if it's simply a French translation of Bill No. 48. Or is the minister translating the French now into English, Mr. Speaker? And maybe that's what he meant when it was a French translation, that he's taking the French law now and translating it back into English again. Because if it's simply a translation, Mr. Speaker, of Bill 48, then it should simply have French in the Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, because the minister isn't clear on what this Bill is about, there's no way we can allow this to move ahead today.

Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the minister was bringing in Bill 48, and we have provisions for translation, to have both the English and the French Bills brought before this House together, Mr. Speaker, in the same Bill, why wasn't it done in Bill 48? Is the minister's department not competent enough to bring in one Bill dealing with the legislation that's supposed to be done with, Mr. Speaker?

You know, I looked through the Bill a little bit and I noticed the part that the minister mentioned, noticed the part the minister mentioned about fetal alcohol or the proper use of alcoholic beverages and gaming.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we're also very concerned about fetal alcohol on this side of the House. In fact is my colleague, Mr. Speaker, from Kelvington has a Bill before the House dealing with that very issue, Mr. Speaker. Dealing with fetal alcohol . . . and the recognition . . . the recognition, Mr. Speaker, of fetal alcohol syndrome day to be on September 9. And I would ask that the members give consideration to that since they're demonstrating also, Mr. Speaker, a concern in this Bill for fetal alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues in this Bill that we need to go over to determine whether or not this is actually a direct translation of Bill No. 48, and it will ask the minister to clarify the need for English in this Bill if it is indeed just a direct translation.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 61

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 61 — The Regional Health Services Act** be now read a second time.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill No. 61 which is concerning the regional health authorities Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has wide, sweeping powers and has the potential to change the very face of health care in Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, we fear that some of these changes will have a negative impact on health care in Saskatchewan. It will not be for the betterment of the people of Saskatchewan, nor will it improve the delivery of service. But what it will do is give almost unlimited power to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, our question is: how is this positive for the people across Saskatchewan who are in need of health care services?

And what this Bill also continues to do is take away more community involvement and more of the decision making and put it into the hands of the Minister of Health. Again we see the NDP and its ministers having more and more say and controlling the very lives of the people in Saskatchewan.

Their record to date, Mr. Speaker, has not been very good. And I think they should consider the people of Saskatchewan that today are suffering needlessly because of the NDP's inadequate response to the health care needs in our province.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen, over the last 10-some years with the NDP, how they have changed how health care is delivered in Saskatchewan. And one of the major concerns is the loss of local input.

Mr. Speaker, in 1993, the NDP chose to close some 50 hospitals as well as the Plains hospital in Regina. The people especially in southern Saskatchewan are still suffering because of that closure. There was needless millions of dollars spent in the closure of the Plains hospital, and it's yet to be shown to anyone in this province how it actually helped them, how it improved the delivery of health care. And I think you need go no further than to ask the doctors and nurses of this province how it has negatively affected the health care delivery in the province of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, not only did it negatively affect people that were used to accessing the Plains hospital, but it also negatively . . . the closure negatively affected people throughout all of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, when the NDP chose to close hospitals, it very negatively affected the delivery that people were receiving in rural Saskatchewan. And it very much limited the local input, and my fear is that with this new Bill, it's going to even further limit local input.

One example of what happened in 1993 was in Bengough, which is in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, and at that time the NDP closed the hospital. I had the opportunity to be there in 1995 and to tour the hospital right after they had locked the doors. The beds were still in place, it looked like it was in full operation, but the place was vacant because the NDP had chosen to close it.

And the people of Bengough had put away several thousand dollars — I believe, if my memory's correct, around \$50,000 — that they had saved. And they intended for that to be used towards improving their existing hospital. That money was taken by the district health board. There's still questions today about what happened to that money. The people in Bengough certainly did not have any say in what happened to it, and it was taken from them.

Radville became a health centre which one had . . . which once had acute care beds. Pangman did not lose their beds at the same time as Radville and Bengough did, but eventually they also lost their acute care beds. And so the result is that Weyburn is the only facility in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy that has acute care beds, and theirs have been greatly reduced over the years.

And this is just an example of one constituency in Saskatchewan. The same has happened throughout all of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And our concern is that this . . . the changes now to regional health boards will again diminish the local input and the say that people have in what is going to happen in their own local centres, and how people in their communities are going to access health care.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have seen, since the restructuring the last time, that health care has not improved but it has continued to decline. We have seen increased length of waiting times for surgery, for tests, to see specialists. We have seen the

workplace deteriorate.

And, Mr. Speaker, I had occasion to speak to a specialist in Regina some month ago, and he told me of his concerns about the decline in the access to operating time in Regina, and the needless time that doctors are having to spend determining how they can work out who's going to access hospital time, how they're going to make it happen, if there are beds for recovery, if there are beds on the ward, and so on. They're spending precious time that they could be using in the direct delivery of health care in order to try and administrate a system that is failing, and failing badly.

And, Mr. Speaker, when . . . it's about I believe in . . . it is in the year 2001, when we had several nurses that worked at the emergency in Regina that came forward and voiced their concern to us, and this concern is still in place today. And I'd just like to quote from one nurse who said:

We as nurses are put in very difficult position due to lack of staffing. We are unable to care for patients properly. We are not staffed to deal with the volume of patients who we keep for . . . 24 hours (plus). (Our) . . . unit is not designed for patients to stay long term. There will be more resignations throughout the district if staffing is not improved.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's been the promise of the NDP since 1999 when the nurses went on strike that they would improve the workplace, and yet today we see that the workplace has not improved. In fact it is in continual decline. We have seen nurses leaving, support staff leaving, and doctors leaving in increasing numbers.

And what the result of this has been, even longer waiting lists and people that are needlessly suffering because they are not able to access care on a timely basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's also been a grave . . . great concern amongst doctors and nurses about the lack of adequate equipment, updated equipment and supplies. One doctor in Regina told me recently that they went for five years without any money at all in their budget for new equipment, and even something as small and what we might consider insignificant, but as scissors in the operating room that were not up to standard of what they should be using.

And so we're happy to see this year, Mr. Speaker, that there are additional dollars for equipment. Sadly some of the money has been spent on items that I think the people of Saskatchewan would probably not agree the dollars should have been spent on, such as ice machines and floor sweepers. And I would hope that the NDP would reconsider next time when they are using precious equipment dollars, where this will be spent.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we have grave concern of people across Saskatchewan about the lack of input that is going to be allowed under the new regional health Act for input from local communities. As well, we do not see any indication that there will be input from doctors and nurses, people that work in the health care system, that could give very, very good advice to the people that are making these decisions and the restructuring of health care in Saskatchewan.

And many of these people have a wealth of information and their expertise and knowledge certainly should be put to use so that we can improve the health care system in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have not only heard from doctors and nurses but we have also recently heard from lab techs and X-ray technicians and other support staff who are suffering because of a lack of adequate staffing.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill further erodes community involvement and services needed and required to carry out the duties in the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised — and this has been a promise since back in the days when medicare was first introduced — that the people of Saskatchewan would have accessible, free health care for everyone no matter where they lived in Saskatchewan. And our concern is that the further you take away the involvement at the local level and it becomes into regional boards, that you're going to have even less accessible health care, you're going to have even less say and input, and people in the outlying areas are going to be forgotten in the fray.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is concern. The concern is being heard across the province about this. And, Mr. Speaker, especially in rural Saskatchewan people have been hard hit by health care reform in the past and so are very leery of what will happen now.

But the ripple effect of the decline in health care services in rural Saskatchewan has been to cause grave concern for the people that live in our major centres of Regina and Saskatoon, because as services decline in rural Saskatchewan, people were pressed to come into Regina in order to access the care they required — not only in the hospital but also to see doctors, specialists, for tests and so on.

And so it has put a very, very major strain on the whole system throughout the province.

(15:00)

And, Mr. Speaker, it's been often brought to my attention, and I have spoke about this in the House previously, is that the whole issue that we have facilities throughout Saskatchewan where we have excellent doctors that are not able to perform to their utmost because they do not have any acute care beds. And they can only offer services such as seeing patients and then diagnosing them and moving them on to someone else should they require hospital care.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the Minister of Health would consider this and utilize these smaller hospitals and the expertise of the doctors that are there, and their willingness to serve the people of their area. Especially for cases for elderly people, seniors that want to stay in their hometown that sometimes require one or two days of hospitalization, and for younger children who need a short stay in the hospital for minor reasons and want to stay close to their families.

And, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Oberholzer of Radville is one doctor in this province and is a prime example of a doctor that has

committed to his community and would certainly like to see some acute care beds added to his facility. And then that would free up time in Regina and Saskatoon, and free up beds for more critical cases. And, Mr. Speaker, we believe on this side of the House that that should certainly be something that should be looked at as far as health care reform.

And, Mr. Speaker, I spoke to Dr. Oberholzer last week and he indicated to me that he has put together a proposal — in fact he gave me a copy. He had also some time ago sent it to the Minister of Health and had requested a meeting with the minister to discuss his proposals. This was before the health care reform and the regional health Bill was finalized. The minister refused to meet with Dr. Oberholzer. He indicated that he didn't meet with individuals, he only met with groups.

And I find that very appalling, Mr. Speaker, that a doctor in Saskatchewan — when we're in such a short supply of doctors — a doctor who cares about his community and about the people of Saskatchewan who has an idea of how we can improve the health care services, would be denied a meeting with the Minister of Health.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the minister would still take into consideration the part that smaller centres throughout Saskatchewan can play in improving a health care delivery in our province.

And, Mr. Speaker, today as the member from Melfort spoke about earlier, that we have a decline in nursing in Saskatchewan and it's becoming very alarming and it is certainly having an influence on the health care delivery that we are . . . have come . . . that we want in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And in Weyburn it's very evident that we have a problem here. We have seen recently where the ICU (intensive care unit) has had to be closed because there were no nurses to staff it. We have EMTs (emergency medical technician) that work in the hospital now on the night shift especially, because there are not enough nurses to staff. Nurses are being denied holidays or else having their holidays cut short because there is no one to cover for them.

And as the member for Melfort indicated, our nurses are working very, very, very many hours of overtime. They are working to exhaustion. They are denied holidays.

And, Mr. Speaker, nurses in this province and other health care workers do this because they believe in the people that they serve. They have a heart for the people. And I really believe that the nurses and support staff in the hospitals have what has held our health care system together at all in this province over the last few years because of their dedication to their job.

And for the Minister of Health today to make jokes about the nursing profession and about the concern about the lack of nurses and that they are leaving our province because of workplace conditions that were promised to be improved in 1999 — and have not to this day been improved, and in fact, they have steadily grown worse — I think it's appalling that the minister would stand up and would take this kind of an approach to a very, very serious issue in our province.

And we are most fortunate that we have got the nurses, the nurses that are still here are here and that we . . . the service that they do provide. And we certainly do not need to be pushing any more of them out of this province by not appreciating them for what they have provided for us.

And, Mr. Speaker, the government, the NDP government, says that they believe in and that they promote rural revitalization. Well, Mr. Speaker, by taking more and more control about . . . away from people and diminishing their say and their delivery of health care in their areas, I do not believe that this is going to revitalize rural Saskatchewan.

The key to survival and growth in rural Saskatchewan is to have services provided, such as hospitals and health service centres; and we need schools and highways. This government is determined to destroy all three.

Mr. Speaker, we must maintain these services in rural Saskatchewan if we are going to revitalize rural Saskatchewan. And one of the key cornerstones of that is a good health care system because people will not stay in, they will not move to, they will not start businesses in areas where there is not adequate health care services.

And this is one of the things that people look at when they are going . . . determining if they should start a business or if they should expand their business.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would . . . it gives us grave concern that less and less care is given to maintaining health services throughout rural Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, the NDP are long . . . have been the champions . . . have held themselves up of the champions of the poor and the less fortunate. And yet in many, many cases our health care system, delivery system, and how it has changed has affected the poor and the less fortunate more than anyone in Saskatchewan because they do not have the means to access services in larger centres.

I know in my constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy that I have had people come to me and ask how they could access services in Regina and Saskatoon. They needed a means of transportation to get there. And not only do they need the means of transportation but they also then have the extra expense of food and lodging, and for many . . . in many instances if family members are in hospital for surgery and are in for several days, these people, their family has to find a way to be able to afford to stay there and be close to them because they are not able to be looked after in rural Saskatchewan in their homes and in their hometowns or communities any longer.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is some of the less fortunate in our society that certainly have been ill-served by the movement of all services or the most important services to deal with health care, to the larger centres. And this doesn't seem to be a concern of the NDP.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned before, that the Bill takes more control away from communities and into the hands of the minister. And this has not worked well in the past. People need to be empowered at the local level in order for them to be able

to make decisions that directly affect them and their families and their communities. And when they have that empowerment, they get involved and they make things happen.

And just one case that I'd like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, is — and we see this in many communities — is local ambulance service where many communities have taken upon themselves the responsibility to ensure that they have a good ambulance service in their area. And they've done this through purchasing ambulances, through volunteers training to work on the ambulance, and coordinators volunteering to get . . . to look after making sure there's always a volunteer in place, and so on.

And I would just like to quote from an article that is in the Radville paper. And the heading is, "Radville EMS appreciates support." And I quote:

Radville EMS since its inception has enjoyed the support of Radville and area in a variety of forms including community fundraisers, personal and memorial donations. This letter is an opportunity for us to thank everyone who has contributed to this cause and gives the public an . . . and give the public an idea of what their donations have purchased. EMS staff need to review these donations and determine what equipment purchases would improve patient care and comfort.

And then, it goes on to list who has given and what purchases they made.

And at the end of the letter, it says:

Radville EMS is proud to acknowledge these people in our community for their support. Without it, the operation of this service would not be possible.

Sincerely, the staff of Radville EMS.

And so, Mr. Speaker, people in rural Saskatchewan and throughout Saskatchewan are willing to get together and to help provide services that this . . . the government has failed to provide for them. But they must feel that they have involvement, that they have some say, and that they are being listened to in order for them to take ownership of these issues and to buy into them.

And, Mr. Speaker, what we see in this Bill is that the government is taking away local control and is putting the control into the hands of the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, the government talks about, in the Bill, community advisory boards and this is their answer to local input. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan, when they hear this, will be asking themselves: is this going to work as well as the transportation advisory committees that were put together some time ago by the NDP as an answer to local input? I know that in my constituency, many of the people that were asked to serve on those boards have since quit, thrown up their hands and said, I have no input anyhow so why am I wasting my time.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that the community advisory boards talked about in this legislation will fall under the same

category. And I have a concern that this will be just another buffer for the NDP government to deflect criticism and to assign blame to someone else, should blame fall.

And, Mr. Speaker, I guess another question that is being asked is: who is making the decisions now? We have the district health boards that are still in place. But my understanding now, from speaking with people in my constituency yesterday who are involved in the committees, is that we now have regional planning committees that are making decisions. Now when I asked if they actually were making decisions, the answer was well, they're not making decisions, they're just making recommendations and then that they will pass these recommendations when they are actually the board in charge.

However, Mr. Speaker, as we know, decisions are being made and are being announced in the media and are being put forward, such as where administration offices are going to be in the new regional districts and where . . . who is going to be the CEOs (chief executive officer). So clearly, the regional planning committees who are, in essence, the new boards are making decisions and they have not been appointed as such yet.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is some concern at the local level that these meetings are being . . . meetings and decisions are being made behind closed doors, that the public has not had input, the public is denied access to these meetings as well as the media. And it is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that even the district boards that are still in place have also been denied access to the meetings, have not been asked to take part in the process.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it's bringing many questions to mind in the local areas about, really, who is in charge and why they are being denied any input into what is going to transpire in the weeks and months ahead in the restructuring of health care in their areas.

And it makes us wonder what kind of planning process would exclude the very people that the plan is being made for. And so it's bringing into question what is going on with this government and what their real intent is.

And, Mr. Speaker, there also refers to in the Bill about affiliates and the service provides . . . that they are going to be able to provide. And it is my understanding from reading the Bill that now affiliates are going to be under the authority of the Minister of Health, the same as every other health service provider in Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have an affiliate in my constituency, the Radville Marion Home, who has had concerns previous to this Bill being introduced, about how they feel that their authority and their decision-making powers have been eroded from them. And this is going to, apparently, further erode their input and their decision making.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to the Committee of the Whole, when I'll be able to ask the minister some direct questions about how affiliates will be affected by this.

Because, Mr. Speaker, affiliates have raised millions of dollars in this province to provide health care. And they've created a very positive environment and have taken the onus upon

themselves to provide this service. And it would be a very sad day for Saskatchewan people should the NDP somehow erode them of their responsibilities and their decision making.

And, Mr. Speaker, if we look at the support of the idea for the regional health . . . I don't believe that there's probably too many in the province that would be opposed to the idea of regionalization if it means that we have a better health care delivery system.

And we recognize the fact there has to be a decision made where specialized services are going to be performed . . . what is the responsibility of hospitals in smaller centres and so on.

But the disconnect with the communities is the problem, Mr. Speaker.

We must give the authority and decision making to local people so that they can best serve the people in their communities. We do not believe that the control should be handed over to the Minister of Health and that the ability to make decisions is solely his. And, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the Bill, three full pages are identifying regulations that can be made and changed.

Now for the people of Saskatchewan who are not used to legislation and so on, they must understand that regulations are changed without coming before the legislature, without public input, without debate. And three full pages of this Bill list items in this Bill that can be changed and altered through regulations. And that is a very, very serious concern of mine and the members of this side of the House, and I'm sure will be of the people of Saskatchewan when they realize that this is what is happening.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to read from an article — this is actually almost a year ago now — that was written by Randy Burton, and it is called "NDP content to sit on its thumbs." And I think it expresses the concern that we have for the health care system in Saskatchewan. And I quote:

For years, if not generations, the NDP in this province has successfully propagated the myth that only it can be trusted to protect medicare. This was an article of faith amongst party members and MLAs during the triumphant days in opposition during the '80s and even during the early '90s when cabinet ministers claimed the NDP's ownership of medicare justified their cuts. At the time they could at least claim they had a plan to reform the system, while they were busy balancing the budget. That notion has long since been abandoned and urgent problems are left to languish.

Desperately trying to craft his image in the mould of Tommy Douglas, Premier Lorne Calvert may be remembered as the man who presided over the death of his idol's dream.

And, Mr. Speaker, there is grave concern throughout all of Saskatchewan because of the health care system that people are asked to live under. And sadly, Mr. Speaker, I believe that many people have grown apathetic to what's going on. They've come to accept the waiting length . . . the time of wait that they have for surgery, for tests, to see a specialist. And it's a sad commentary on what is going on in the province that was the founder of medicare that we have come to this, Mr. Speaker,

where we cannot provide care for the people of this province.

And as an MLA, and I'm sure that most members of the Legislative Assembly also receive on a daily basis horror stories from people in Saskatchewan who have received inadequate service from the health care delivery system that we have in Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, in 1999 the NDP made promise after promise of what they would do to improve health care in Saskatchewan. And the heading of their platform was, We'll Improve Health Care with More Staff and Service Commitments.

And, Mr. Speaker, they indicated that they would improve care by adding 500 more health care providers and we all know that that certainly has not happened. In fact we have lost, I believe, it's around 1,200 workers since that time.

They also promised that they would have publicly funded ambulance service. And to quote from their promise in the election campaign:

We'll introduce a single reasonable fee for ambulance services. And we'll begin to reduce ambulance charges throughout the province — starting by eliminating all fees for transfers between health (care) institutions.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that that has not happened. Mr. Speaker, key — another promise — key service commitments:

We'll work with health providers to ensure that key service standards are met for all patients. Three key priorities:

All patients arriving at emergency rooms will get a preliminary evaluation by a health provider within 15 minutes of arrival;

And, Mr. Speaker, we know that that's not happened. I had occasion to visit an emergency ward in Regina about two weeks ago and the sign up in the emergency ward is, you know, giving two to three to four hours of time that you would have to wait.

And, Mr. Speaker, another promise was waiting times for key surgical procedures will be cut by at least 30 per cent over the next four years. And, Mr. Speaker, we know that that certainly has not happened.

And I hear the members opposite talking about emergency and the care that's given there. And it certainly is not . . . has any reflection on the people that work in emergency. It is because they are . . . have a staff shortage.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, now in Regina and Saskatoon, in the aisles we have permanent beds there. At one time when I've did . . . when I visited the hospitals in 1999 they had them temporarily and they'd say, well this is where we have a bed set up in the aisle for today. But now when you go they actually have the numbers on the walls. They are permanent fixtures, Mr. Speaker, because they do not have enough beds to look after the people. And if the members opposite would care to go and see for themselves and visit a hospital in Regina or Saskatoon, they would find that this in fact is true.

And, Mr. Speaker, so the promises of 1999 campaign certainly have not been kept. And, Mr. Speaker, another promise is . . . was that they would fair and improved access to health care services, and I guess that's what this whole Bill is supposed to be proposing and making available. But this was a promise in 1999 and it . . . I quote from their campaign promise:

Over the next four years, we'll continue to work to improve services in communities across the province — ensuring that services are available to people as close as possible to where they live. Some of the services that we will be protecting or expanding in all parts of the province include:

Basic medical and emergency services

Diagnostic services such as lab testing, x-rays, and CT scans

Asthma programs

Obstetrics and follow-up care for children

Women's health services such as breast cancer screening and improved treatment for heart disease and stroke

Early childhood intervention services

Diabetes and renal dialysis programs

Improved mental health services.

In fact what we've seen in the mental health system is that they have a cut in the money that is . . . that they can access for services. It certainly has not been improved. And if you go down the list, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that most people in Saskatchewan could attest to that these promises have not been kept. In fact conditions have not improved, they have deteriorated.

And, Mr. Speaker, another promise was that they would improve working conditions. And we know today that by reading the paper and the comments from the RNs that this certainly has not helped. And, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if any of these promises have been kept and no wonder there is contempt for the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are waiting; many are suffering on waiting lists. Many whose quality of life has been very negatively affected and many whose families have also been negatively affected. And sadly to say, Mr. Speaker, some people have lost their lives in this province because they could not access adequate health care service on a timely basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, many people have had to go out of province and out of country to access health care services, because they had to make a decision whether they would sit here in Saskatchewan and wait their turn to access service or whether they would pay, after they've paid taxes all their life, and they had to decide if they would pay again to go somewhere else to access service.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just spoke to a lady yesterday from the town of Bengough who was put in this very situation, who had

to go to the Mayo Clinic because she could not access the appropriate treatment in Saskatchewan. In fact, we did not even have a doctor in Saskatchewan who could perform the very specialized surgery that she needed. And she did not have the time to sit around and find out and get approval — she had four days that she was given to get to the Mayo Clinic — and is now hoping that she can be paid for those services, Mr. Speaker.

But this is the kind of situation that people are faced in Saskatchewan, they have to decide to go ahead and spend a lifesavings in order to access the care they need. And, Mr. Speaker, sadly we have grown apathetic and we have accepted this as a way of life, and it's a sad commentary on the NDP government.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are many other of my colleagues who want to speak to this Bill because of the huge impact that it's going to have in their constituencies and our concern about more and more power and control being put in the hands of the Minister of Health and into the hands of government, and less and less control by the local communities and less say in how health services will be delivered.

So at this time, I would adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. No. 62

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 62 — The Health Statutes Consequential Amendments Act, 2002/Loi de 2002 apportant des modifications corrélatives à certaines lois sur la santé** be now read a second time.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill No. 62 which is a consequential amendment to the . . . that is tied to Bill 61. And so, we have asked that these Bills be stayed together . . . or to . . . that they stay together and we speak to them at the same time. And so we will move to adjourn debate on Bill 61 as well . . . or 62 as well. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 57

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag **Bill No. 57 — The Automobile Accident Insurance Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand in the House today to address Bill No. 57, an Act which deals with a number of critical changes to the automobile accident insurance in Saskatchewan.

On June 7, the minister briefly outlined these changes in regards to the new Safe Driver Recognition program and the new tort system which be optional to the present no-fault system.

I would like to talk today about the various aspects contained in this Bill, along with some questions which are very important in

defining this new legislation. First of all, the new Safe Driver Recognition program, since the recent provincial mail-out to our residents which promoted this new program, my office has had several inquiries about the limitations of the program. The safe driver program provides good drivers with a very modest 7 per cent or less reduction in licensing cost depending on the point system. We see that poor drivers receive points against this system and so they will have to pay extra.

While the fundamental point system is something that Saskatchewan drivers have been calling for, most people thought that the program, however modest it might be, should be applied for all vehicles licensed in this province. Right now, this bonus program applies only to private vehicles and farm class vehicles.

The business owners in Arm River constituency are not happy about being left out of the process. Certainly, they agree that the private citizens and struggling farmers be given the break that they need in these uncertain economic times. But they are asking to be included in this program. Many of these businesses are enduring economic hardships as well. And they want to have available the same kind of reductions that apply to all the rest of the citizens in Saskatchewan.

There are many truckers that drive many years and never have a single traffic violation. This is quite a feat considering the amount of hours that they spend on the road each week, and given the fact that the licensing fees they're assessed represent a major operating expense for their trucking company.

I would like to ask the minister, that while he states that 72 per cent of the province's vehicle population and two out of three vehicle owners will receive a discount in their vehicle insurance, what is his reason for the business owners and truckers to be shut out of this program?

What I would suggest is that we're seeing more of what this government does best, and that is not to support in any way private businesses who wish to succeed and produce jobs for the province of Saskatchewan.

So it is clear that the only way that the other 28 per cent of the province's vehicles that are not covered by this new program will get coverage is maybe to create a new Crown corporation, then maybe they will be covered.

There are also questions arising from people that in the habit . . . that are in the habit of an annual renewal of their vehicle licence. Of course before changes were made to allow for optional payments every three months — and every month now — people in this province were used to paying their licence plates up for a full year. And there are still many residents who prefer this method of paying in full on their renewal date.

However it's been determined that if your renewal is today for example, in the month of June, you will not receive any discount on this annual renewal unless it is renewed after July 1, 2002.

We live in the computer age, so what is so hard about applying the 7 per cent discount in advance for the 11 months that applies to the annual renewal? I guess that it's just another way

this government attempts to draw more money out of those who can afford to renew annually.

And then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a curious case of the fee structure presently used by SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) in case of a licence plate transfer. This would be a case that no doubt will be repeated in the next few months.

I have a constituent who is retired and no longer able to drive. He no longer has a driver's licence due to health problems. Now presently he has always registered his car in his name and his wife drives the car. This constituent inquired about the discount on his vehicle licence only to find out that he does not qualify because he has no driver's licence.

The only way to get the discount is to transfer the car to his wife's name. The fee for this is \$20. But there's a little more to this than that. The licence plates were personalized and for the transfer into his wife's name there was another \$20 fee. That makes \$40 in total fees so that they can take advantage of a 7 per cent discount in the wife's name. The discount on his \$500 annual licence plate renewal is \$35.

So when you look at this situation, the gentleman's actually paying \$5 more to get the discount for this year.

(15:30)

And I said that this won't be that uncommon, given that many seniors residing in our province today. It may also apply to disabled people who do not have a driver's licence. They own and plate a car, hire a driver, and have no one to transfer the plates to so as to obtain the discount. This definitely is something that the minister will have to address as time goes by with his new discount program.

There are many aspects in this Bill which look at the whole no-fault insurance program that this government put in place in 1995. The minister said in his comments on June 7 that, quote, "no program is perfect." And I think that all of us here on the opposition side agree that the . . . with the minister that no-fault insurance was far from perfect.

Indeed the hard-working members of the Coalition Against No-fault Insurance have been telling this government for years about the serious problems with the no-fault insurance presently in place. The premier option that this government seems to be adopting is one that the coalition has been advocating ever since no-fault was put in place seven years ago.

Many people with severe . . . with serious injuries calls . . . caused by at-fault parties have received far from adequate levels of compensation for the tragic . . . tragedy that have been . . . that they have been through, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Any avenues to pursue additional compensation for their injuries were far and . . . were few and far between. Now at least we're seeing some light at the end of the tunnel for these people.

The minister indicated that medical and rehab limits have been increased from half a million to 5 million and are retroactive to those that have been seriously injured since January 1, 1995. Well this increase, for those with serious injuries as a result of a car crash, clearly we must look at the difference between the

two amounts and declare that this alone indicates how much this government has failed injury claimants in the last seven years.

But when you look at the Bill and when you look at the issue of the maximum permanent impairment benefit, we see only a modest increase to 175,000 from the current benefit of 143,000. I would certainly like a clearer statement from the minister on how this will be achieved . . . will achieve in any way the quality of life for someone who is severely, permanently impaired by giving him only \$32,000 more for the same injury. You know clearly on this Bill the minister's math is inconsistent in certain regards of this Bill.

We see that, also looking at this Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, see that the income replacement benefit now pays up to 90 per cent of net income based on a maximum gross salary of \$58,000 per year. Now this would appear, on the surface at least, to cover a broad range of incomes that would be normal and are economic today. However, we must be very careful when this government talks about paying up to 90 per cent of net income. I believe the words up to 90 per cent are like a lottery that you can win up to 100,000, when in fact you may only win \$10,000 at the end of the day.

So I'd like to see some more clarification on when the 90 per cent figures apply to injury claimants.

Also, the minister in his second reading speech talks about taking into account the personal situations for injured people such as caregivers, self-employed, and also people in the farming sector. The new insurance program would reportedly provide a benefit that allows them to hire apparently substitute workers to keep the business going. A business owner that cannot continue his business because of injury will be entitled for compensation for a limited time for what the government terms as fixed expenses, which continue after the accident.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to see a clearer idea of what these fixed expenses would be, and how the affected businesses would be compensated in this situation. Would it be enough for the injured business owner to discontinue the business without a significant loss? I'm wondering, you know, about that point.

And when we see another proposed change that would indicate that an injury claimant would receive an income replacement of no less than the industrial average wage, now this, now this could be quite an increase over the current minimum benefit which is basically minimum wage. Hardly a wage that would look after the extra expenses that an injured person would have. Hopefully the minister will give us an idea of what the industrial average wage would be, according to this government.

Bill 57 also includes some proposed changes to the death benefit provided to surviving spouses and dependent children. The proposal would calculate death benefits based on the income for the year prior to a person's death. Now the minister adds that this will allow for a lost job or an on leave at the time of the accident. Certainly we have to provide as much of a death benefit that we are able in these tragic circumstances. But we cannot outline a death benefit simply based on one year's

previous income.

What if the reverse is true? What if the accident victim had been unemployed or on leave the year before; and further had he been working this year at a very good paying job when the accident occurred? Then I guess we would just have to declare that this person had bad luck, and I believe we have to base the accident victim's income on the best-case scenario perhaps allowing for a review of three years income instead of one year's income. I'm hoping that the minister looks at that.

Death benefits to dependants of low wage earners will be provided with a death benefit compatible to federal support guidelines for a minimum wage earner. We would hope that these benefits would treat the afflicted family with compassion and not simply a need to look at the unfortunate low wages the victim was receiving.

Disabled dependants over 21 will also receive these death benefits. And I must state for the record that the death benefit in this situation will hopefully address the needs of the disabled adult who suffers a loss as tragic as this. We see in this legislation that there is an increased death benefit provided to parents of a child under 21 who dies in a motor vehicle accident. More will be provided I understand in the Bill for funeral expenses, counselling for the surviving spouse, and grief counselling for the entire family. In a tragedy, you know such as this, I guess any extra assistance is welcome.

So I would ask the minister in this case just what would be the defining elements of this case. Would it apply to all children under 21 that are riding in the vehicle or driving . . . or for that matter driving the car that is declared to have caused the accident, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Exactly what would happen here isn't that clear and I guess maybe hopefully some of these questions can be answered later in this session under Committee of the Whole.

Looking at the Bill, looking at the issue of lawsuits and the right to sue for pain and suffering, we all know that in the no-fault years there was very little opportunity to go to the legal system to obtain any additional benefits for a car accident victim. Now we see this government finally realizing that a limited amount of legal compensation is needed so the extreme cases of injury are properly compensated.

We can start off by looking at the impaired driving . . . drivers who cause an accident. People injured as a result of these convicted drivers will have the right to sue the at-fault individual for pain and suffering, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The impaired driver — looking at the Bill — will be denied a permanent impairment benefit as well and if this is their second offence in five years they'll be denied income replacement benefits.

Now hopefully this will serve as a deterrent to those individuals who drink and drive, I guess, without worrying. But you know talking about that though, there are also many questions that arise when we look at why this government decided to return to a tort legal avenue as an option to the no-fault insurance program. The NDP has known for many years now that many innocent people have fallen through the numerous holes in the no-fault insurance plan. The number of cases has steadily risen

as documented over the number of years which the members opposite would be quite aware of.

Since 1995 the legal options to obtain extra benefits for those that have been victimized are so limited they were hardly worth pursuing. It would be interesting to examine whether this government has realized that compassion and understanding were notably absent in no-fault or whether political motives were at the heart of this dramatic shift in insurance policies.

I'd like to talk a little more about the troubling aspects we have with Bill 57. But I also want to get back to some of the amendments in some detail. One of the scenarios described in this Bill is regarding intentional acts, that is drivers who intentionally use their vehicle to deliberately harm a person.

Now no one would want to admit in our society today the possibility of this kind of criminal violence exists in our province. However, there are these kinds of problems and they are numerous enough to be mentioned in Bill 57.

Now of course a driver who's convicted, if I understand right, of using their vehicle to intentionally cause injury will be treated severely. This person will be denied both income replacement and permanent impairment benefits. And a victim now, now will have the right to proceed legally against this individual for pain and suffering which . . . many individuals over the number of years have been calling for that.

You know, the question which can arise would be some sort of a clear statement which indicates whether the person who is harmed falls into categories of either pedestrian, or an innocent driver of the other vehicle, or of course innocent people who were in the vehicle of the convicted driver himself.

Another amendment deals with . . . third parties will also be liable if it is determined that their negligence contributes to a car accident. The minister talked in his second readings about these third parties such as vehicle manufacturers, mechanical repairs, and parts suppliers, as well as licensed drinking establishments. We hope that the government has included enough guidelines so that certain definitions of liable third parties will be clearly stated in our justice system. If too much interpretation is required, then innocent third parties could be caught up in a legal battle in which neither the victim nor the defendant would be well served.

As well as another issue that it deals with is mechanical failure, which in most cases is not difficult to detect but in some instances it can be.

The whole issue of responsibility, also, of the average hotel owner in contributing to car crash has and probably will remain a serious debate in this province. In short we need to have the needed clarifications for the bar owners, then many difficult situations where the amount of liquor served would not be an issue which would tangle up the legal system for many years and which can happen in many cases. I think that's something the minister should be addressing at that end.

Also a look at proposed changes to the appeal system definitely needs to be worked on. The minister has stated that they're developing a new appeal system which should be in place early

next year.

Now currently an injured person can dispute any decision from SGI by requesting an internal review, also optional mediation, or applying to the Court of Queen's Bench. The new proposal would include an independent appeal tribunal which forwards a report to a different minister of the Crown. The question that would be obvious here is, how would this proposal be any better if you have all the ministers sitting around the same cabinet table? There's no doubt that different cabinet minister would be discussing the issue with the minister responsible for SGI.

So I don't see how this appeal can be called independent if you think of this situation in the terms I just spoke about. But of course this seems to be the way this government thinks or handles a lot of things these days — a review by the NDP for the NDP and about the NDP, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Another issue we talked about that deals in this Bill is the premier option that has been put forward by the Coalition Against No Fault Insurance. Now it represents a compromise between a right to sue for unlimited benefits to a system which has certain limitations but still gives the injured person the right to sue, if I understand right, an at-fault party for pain and suffering.

Now the minister's gone to great lengths to indicate that the premier option and no fault option will be similarly priced. However the limits that the premier option sets may be closely examined to ensure that the victims are fairly compensated when they pursue legal action in any injury case.

Also dealing with the two systems, I've talked to a couple of people that sell insurance and they don't even know how exactly it's going to work. Is it going to be up to them to explain which system to work? They want to know . . . naturally, hopefully there will be courses on it. But they really don't want to get into the advising of which, which one to go, because if an accident occurs further down the road, naturally the person will be coming back to the person that sold them the insurance and say well, why did you talk me into that plan? I would have been better off under this plan.

So there's lots of questions there that have been raised just to my office when this was first announced at the beginning of the year that they'd be going to it. I had quite a few people that sold insurance — SGI agents, independent brokers — that are very, very concerned about this coming up.

Another thing they were talking about is a deductible that would be in the amount of 5,000, the reason I guess being to keep nuisance case of pain and suffering awards to a minimum.

Now we certainly don't want to see our provincial court system, you know, burdened with lots of petty little cases, yet we also must ensure that the people who have larger and perhaps more pressing injuries to get the needed resources, that they may get on with their lives.

The government still has in place, I believe, defined benefits for injured person regarding who is at fault. Whether these defined benefits are adequate is still certainly a question. When we look

at the tort option, we see that lost wages will be paid up to \$300 per week. This amount is certainly very low when we look at the costs the average Saskatchewan family is looking at these days.

When we talk about families, I see that there is provisions for homemakers and those not employed if they are injured. And I think it's been a long time coming that this government realize the contributions of homemakers, caregivers, farmers, people that are in the system, you know, that maybe aren't under a wage, and it's kind of hard to define exactly how they . . . what kind of a wage they have. So I'm glad that they're looking at that, you know, and that's something that should have been looked at years ago. This government always seems to be fairly far behind. It always seems to be us that has to remind them to be looking at stuff like this.

Another benefit, another option in looking at that Bill there, I see that \$150,000 when a person suffers catastrophic injuries. Now I'd like to see a clearer definition of the word for that, what they call that kind of injuries. Because once again, any ill-defined term which is used in a court of law could end up in endless, endless legal wrangling, Mr. Speaker, and basically less benefits to the affected person as a result of higher legal fees.

But even this money could be inadequate as the medical costs are constantly on the rise, and also if a person needs to be treated out of province. And with this government it seems to be that there has to be more and more the case unfortunately, the way the medical system and the way they handle it in this province has been going.

Another aspect I would like to talk a little bit about the Bill is the death benefits. Through the tort, would be available to the surviving spouse for a minimum of 45,000 as well as the death benefit for dependent children to equal 5 per cent of the weekly income of the deceased.

Now I don't have a problem with death benefits, which of course would be sorely needed by any surviving family, especially with dependent children. This tragic you know situation is well beyond the issue of money when it occurs in many cases suddenly. You know we as . . . unfortunately in this province many people live in hard economic times and many families are struggling as it is.

The minister also talks about benefits provided for those who suffer also permanent injuries as a result of an accident to a maximum of \$10,000.

Now we see that the minister, in the second reading, repeats itself in talking about injuries with a maximum permanent impairment benefit rising to \$130,000 in this event.

This certainly lends to quite a bit of interpretation by you know . . . could lead to quite a bit of interpretation by lawyers and our legal system. This government does not seem to realize that it must define terminology of this new program or the law system will be bogged down in lawsuits which will not benefit anybody in the long run.

The minister also talks about indexing the benefits to the cost of

living. This indexing would apply to both forms of insurance coverage. While indexing the benefits would seem to be a fairly straightforward idea within the bounds of no-fault insurance, I would ask the minister how would he be indexing the benefits of the tort system when all that is known is a minimum and maximum amounts that are awarded? What is the . . . What are the same percentage? Will they apply to any award under the tort system?

There is also a provision that any injured person would be able to sue for economic losses, that being the losses incurred a result of a collision above defined benefits. Certainly this could be seen as a very grey area. However there must of course be some allowances for economic loss in the event of a car accident injury.

The minister kept stressing that the 5,000 deductible will keep any such nuisance case out of our legal system. In any event, however, there are a few lawyers which would offer advice to ask for anything but an amount far higher than this deductible so as to obtain enough benefits for their client, and for the legal fees that would be required to pursue a case through the court.

The minister also talked about the ability of parents being able to make the decision on behalf of their children for the no-fault or the premier option of car accident insurance. It is very important that parents have this option as they should have, Mr. Speaker.

The question here: what would happen in the event of a divorce or separation or when there's a question of a custody before the courts? Who in this instance would be responsible making the decision on behalf of the children? What would happen to dependent, adult children who are disabled and otherwise unable to make this critical decision on their own?

Another issue that has been brought up is — and I don't think this Bill addresses it — is an exemption for municipalities for liability in cases other than when there's gross negligence involved. Over the past year or two there have been cases where individuals have taken rural, urban municipalities to court over instances that simply did not warrant the excessive drain on municipal budgets. In order that we can protect the viability of a municipal government, we must include this kind of language in any legislation where the ability to sue is an issue.

You know, I'm not talking about a serious case of neglect where a municipal government or an urban government is clearly to blame, but basically a lot of legal wrangling could, you know, very well break a municipal government. So that's . . . and that has been . . . I've had numerous calls or different RMs have talked to us about that, and they're not that happy that that's not included in this Bill. They would like to see some changes coming up or some clarifications on that, Mr. Speaker, you know.

Quite clearly, you know, there are several nagging questions that bear repeating. We need to have the definition of a person injured in the accident. And would that include a pedestrian, the people in the victim's car, and the people who are driving with the at-fault driver? I would like to see this part of the legislation completely clarified.

In . . . (inaudible) . . . there are parts of this legislation that do need some work, and I'm hoping the members opposite will take a look at it. I've had other members talk about the different options, but I'd like to kind of talk — the Bill itself, and it is a quite lengthy Bill — to point out some of the legal problems that could arise from it.

But with that, Mr. Speaker, I have . . . I know there are other members that would like to address this Bill, so I will adjourn debate right now.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 70

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Higgins that **Bill No. 70 — The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to enter into this debate. And may I say at the outset that when the NDP was in the opposition, they were strong proponents of fall sessions of the legislature which would introduce the key Bills for the session and then adjourn so that there could be time for reflection and public debate prior to coming back to the spring session at which the formal debate in the House would occur and Bills could then be voted on and passed or amended.

Unfortunately as the NDP moved from opposition to government, they abandoned what I think was a very sound policy. And what we have instead found is that in the present session — we came into session in March — with the exception of the budget, we have dealt with quite trivial, irrelevant legislation up until well on into June. And in June the significant pieces of legislation, including labour standards, the hog barn Bill before us today; the ethanol Bill; the no-fault Bill that was before us today; and the regional health, the new health regions Bill came before us way late in the session, obviously in the hope that everyone would be tired of debate, tired of the session, and these Bills would be passed without serious debate.

And I think that is not productive of a healthy democracy. It's not productive of healthy debate. It is undermining this Assembly. And it is, of course, contrary to what the NDP said they believed in when they were in opposition.

Now if I may address my colleagues on the opposition side, the Saskatchewan Party now says that it is in favour of fall sessions, it is in favour of placing significant legislation on the table so that it can be debated and discussed — not only in here, but in the province as a whole — rather than holding back significant pieces of legislation until the dying days of the session and then all of a sudden whipping it out.

This is not the way to do it, and I would hope that the Saskatchewan Party would stand by its principles in the event that they become government and not follow the NDP of saying one thing in opposition and doing something very different in government.

Well that said, the legislation before us would bring hog barn workers under the provisions of The Labour Standards Act.

This is not unique or new in the sense that there are already some other agricultural workers under the provisions of The Labour Standards Act.

These include workers in egg hatcheries, greenhouses and nurseries, and brush-clearing operations, and now, as I say, hog barn operations. Mr. Speaker, Labour Standards Act is to provide the minimal worker rights in our province.

There has been an historic exemption for those workers on family farms. They do not come under The Labour Standards Act. So the question then becomes, are workers in commercial hog operations do they follow the family farm model or do they follow the industrial model?

I think it is self-evident that commercial hog operations are not family farm, they are industrial, and therefore I support this legislation before us this afternoon. I wish to say that I, myself, and my party are not among those on this side of the House who believe that the decline of western civilization can be dated from the introduction of laws against child labour during the Industrial Revolution.

The essential point about commercial hog operations is that they follow regular scheduled shifts. And that's what makes them industrial. And that of course is why the family farm has not been under labour standards, because you cannot run a family farm under scheduled hours of work and regular shifts. That's not the way a family farm operates.

But it is the way industry operates and it is the way commercial hog operations operate. So granting workers in commercial hog operations these minimal guarantees that all other workers in the province have, only makes sense to my way of thinking.

(16:00)

Now members of the opposition have said, quite correctly, that there are commercial operations, commercial hog operations which already guarantee to their workers rights equal to or superior to those rights contained in The Labour Standards Act. Well while that is correct, my only answer to that is that those commercial hog operations which are already granting to their workers those rights contained in the Act are not affected by this Act. It will have no impact on them whatsoever.

It has also been pointed out by members of the Saskatchewan Party that some commercial hog operations are under union agreements. And there again, if commercial hog workers are under union agreements, this Act will have no impact on them whatsoever.

The Saskatchewan Party says we need to build rural Saskatchewan. And I hope that is a statement which has the support of every member of this House. However, surely, Mr. Speaker — surely, Mr. Speaker, we are increasing rural Saskatchewan, we are building Saskatchewan, when we give workers in rural areas the same workers' rights as workers elsewhere. And when we try and deny workers basic rights, we make rural Saskatchewan a less attractive place to live and to work. And I would ask my friends in the Saskatchewan Party to bear that in mind when they vote.

If you want people to live in rural Saskatchewan, you want people to build lives and careers in rural Saskatchewan, then give those workers the same basic rights as workers elsewhere have, particularly when you are dealing with what is a commercial and industrial operation.

Mr. Speaker, in this case, I do find myself in agreement with one proposal before this House that comes from the NDP government and I say in terms of the Labour minister, that bringing forth this piece of legislation is proof that even a stopped clock is right twice a day. But I think that they have gotten it wrong in most circumstances but, on this occasion, I believe — I believe that this is not the family farm when you have massive commercial hog operations. This is the industrial model. The industrial model follows the basic laws of The Labour Standards Act.

Now the only . . . now the Saskatchewan Party has also said, what if the owners of the operation — there are several of them — and then they have one employee so they get up to the minimum number to be a commercial hog operation. Well of course the answer to that is simple. Owners aren't employees. Employees are employees, owners are owners.

So I simply do not think, I do not think that giving rural workers, workers in rural Saskatchewan, the same basic rights as other commercial and industrial workers is any more likely to destroy this province than the minimum wage laws and the child labour laws that I know some of my friends over here find so destructive, but I must say I do not.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, on behalf of the Liberal Party, that while we are in opposition to the NDP's use of the Crown corporations to drive private business out of this province, the way they have undermined investment in this province, the way they have undermined economic development in this province, that notwithstanding Liberal opposition to the way the NDP has failed to manage economic development in Saskatchewan, that we are not members of the Flat Earth Society.

Now the one point that has been made by the Saskatchewan Party is that it would be very, very destructive if The Labour Standards Act was applied to the family farm. And I am in agreement that you cannot run a family farm according to regular shift work — that's the way it is.

However it is illogical to vote against this Bill on something that is not before us on the basis that it may some day and at some undefined time in the future be before us. If there is an amendment at some time before us to bring family farm employees under The Labour Standards Act, I will oppose it. But that isn't before us. What is before us is should workers in commercial industrial hog operations be treated the same as employees in other commercial industrial operations?

To my way of thinking the answer is obvious. The answer is obvious. If we want to build rural Saskatchewan let us elevate the position of workers in commercial and industrial operations in rural Saskatchewan to the same level as that enjoyed by other workers. And I support this legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to this Bill, Bill No. 70, The Labour Standards Amendment Act. In fact as a duly elected member of this Hon. Assembly, I see it as my duty to speak to this flawed and cynical piece of legislation that once again picks winners and losers in our economy. And this time, and this time, Mr. Speaker, it's in a rural economy — our agricultural economy, that economy that's so much the heart of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is just one more strike at agriculture by this NDP government who know they now have no support in rural Saskatchewan. This government, Mr. Speaker, that know they won't win one single seat likely in rural Saskatchewan — including the one presently occupied by the Minister of Agriculture.

They have nothing to lose, Mr. Speaker, by further harming agriculture in this province to appease their union masters — those union masters, Mr. Speaker, who will fund their next election campaign. Mr. Speaker, this is a crass political sellout of the agricultural industry for the sole purpose of appeasing the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.

The hog industry has invested hundreds of million dollars into the struggling economy of this province. They have created thousands of direct and indirect jobs. Those jobs offer good pay and good benefit packages. And the hog industry offers employment and top salaries for our university grads in management positions.

Mr. Speaker, this failing government doesn't have many economic development successes to crow about. But the hog industry is one of the brighter spots in an otherwise pretty dismal record of job creation and economic development. More investment is required in this great industry, Mr. Speaker, if Saskatchewan is ever to reach our economic potential. This is one of the industries in which we have a natural advantage and great potential, and this government is willing to sacrifice that potential and the potential of this province to further appease organized labour.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if they do it, if they force this Bill into legislation, the people of Saskatchewan will remember this sellout at election time and there will be a price to pay for this arrogant, worn-out government and the left-wing, anti-business party that these members represent.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't just a rural or agricultural issue. The hog industry, this successful industry that the government is willing to harm or even to sacrifice so that organized labour will fill their election campaign coffers, is a great benefit to the entire province. This industry broadens the tax base, both by direct taxation opportunities for the province and by indirect taxation opportunities from employees of the industry and the businesses that supply the industry in our cities and towns. Every nickel of tax revenue that is generated from a successful hog industry is a nickel of taxes that the rest of us all over this province, in rural areas and in our cities, don't have to pay.

Mr. Speaker, through this piece of legislation, this government is killing the goose that laid the golden egg . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I wonder if the member for

Athabasca might want to just walk around and have his conversation so that we can hear the member who is speaking.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through this piece of legislation this government is killing the goose that laid the golden egg and every citizen of this province should be gravely concerned. This is a dishonest and self-serving attempt by this government to wilfully . . . to an important, successful, and growing industry in this province; an industry that has been very fair and compassionate with their employees, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is extremely unfair for this government to pick out the hog industry for this kind of vilification, and it is quite apparent that this industry is just a stepping stone for this Saskatchewan Federation of Labour puppet, the NDP government, to bring other sectors of agriculture under the umbrella of The Labour Standards Act.

Hansard of June 13, 2002 gives insight into the long-range plans of this minister, Mr. Speaker, and this government, where the minister, speaking in support of this Bill, contends that agriculture was exempted from The Labour Standards Act because of some old-fashioned picture that she paints of a family farm of bygone years. But she goes on to say, and I quote:

But the face of agriculture . . . has changed . . .

Mr. Speaker, those words should send a chill down the back of every farm operator in this province that has employees. That I think is a telling as to the government's analysis of modern specialized agriculture, and I believe that it is an omen for other sectors of agriculture and what they can expect from the government in terms of labour legislation for the agricultural industry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, proper consultation has not occurred with either hog barn operators or employees. And I quote from a Sask Pork media release dated May 14, 2002:

Sask Pork, an industry organization representing Saskatchewan's pork producers took issue today with remarks made by Minister of Agriculture in the legislature on Monday. Joan Steckhan, director of industry development for Sask Pork disagreed with the Minister of Agriculture that a consultation process on employment standards for the hog industry is under way.

"Unfortunately (and she's quoted here, unfortunately, she says) on May 1 after only one meeting, the Minister's consultant cancelled the consultation process mentioned by Minister Serby. He told our representatives that there would be no further meetings." Steckhan said. "From the point of view of producers, there is no consultation process taking place."

"Our industry has repeatedly asked the Minister of Agriculture for meaningful consultation on this issue," Steckhan stated. "If the Minister of Agriculture could get a real consultation process started, producers would be very happy."

Mr. Speaker, this Bill makes our hog industry uncompetitive with our neighbours — neighbouring jurisdictions that have no such legislation in place.

Mr. Speaker, there's been no consultation process with either hog barn operators or employees. The only group that this government has had consultations with is the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. This Bill is a dishonest and crass attempt by this minister and this government to malign one of our greatest industries in this province for no other purpose than to fill the NDP Party's campaign fund with union money.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

(16:15)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

(Subvote HI01)

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On my left is Harvey Brooks, the deputy minister of the department. To my right is the assistant deputy minister for operations, Barry Martin. And behind Barry Martin is Fred Antunes, the director of operations, planning, and business support. Directly behind me, Don Wincherauk, the assistant deputy minister for corporate services. Next to Don is Carl Neggers, the assistant deputy minister for policy and planning. And next to Mr. Neggers is Stella Madsen, manager of sustainable infrastructure. And in the back row is Cathy Lynn Borbely, leader of the budget development group.

Mr. Chair, there are a couple of comments that I would like to make as we begin. I would like to note that I have the answer to the question that was asked by the member opposite during our June 13 session in Committee of Finance. The question, as I recall, asked if the Farmer Rail Car Coalition received similar funding from other partners as they previously received from the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, in his opening statements on June 13, the member opposite made the observation that the topic of the Farmer Rail Car Coalition was contemporary and of immediate interest. On this particular point the member opposite and myself can certainly agree.

Mr. Chair, on Monday, June 10 it was brought to my attention that the Sask Party office had put forward an access to information request to my department regarding the acquisition of rail cars and a related maintenance facility.

Following discussion that day with my officials as a . . . a

response was finalized and sent to the Sask Party caucus office with an invitation to a thorough briefing regarding the disposition of the federal hopper car fleet and the support provided to the Farmer Rail Car Coalition by the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, the disposition of the federal hopper car fleet and the endeavours of the coalition to acquire that fleet are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. These endeavours have wide support of farm organizations across Western Canada.

Mr. Chair, in addition to the response we have prepared for the member opposite, I would like to take the opportunity to again invite the member and members opposite to a full and open briefing regarding the initiative of the coalition and the support, both past and current, that the province of Saskatchewan is providing for the coalition.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Minister, thank you for the statement and the information that you have provided again. I accept with some gratitude, I would say, your offer to sit down with myself and members of the official opposition to review the Farm Rail Car Coalition, the agreements that have been put in place, and the opportunities that the purchase of those grain cars may or may not afford farmers.

I think the reality is that we would be prepared to take advantage of that offer. We think that it's important that we have as much information on that situation as possible. And in light of the offer, I would defer questions on the Farmer Rail Car Coalition from today's session to a later session because we may be better informed of the government's intentions and the intentions of the partners in that coalition as it pertains to the possible purchase and eventual operation of those cars.

In light of that, Mr. Minister, I . . . And I also notice that lateness of the hour in today's estimate session. So what I would like to do, if it's agreeable, I think we'd give the remaining time of today's session to various members from the opposition who have individual and specific issues they'd like to deal with in connection with roads in their constituencies.

If I may so do, I would like to turn the rest of the session over to the member from Watrous.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't think the minister is going to be overly surprised that my questions today are going to be on Highway No. 15. I've brought the issue up a number of times every session since I've been elected and the condition of that stretch of highway has deteriorated even further at an alarming rate. And I feel that for safety purposes it's almost becoming unacceptable for travel. It's also a serious impediment to the economic growth in the community where it is located.

So I have met, and I know the minister has also met, with the business people from the town of Nokomis and it was brought to my attention, as I'm sure it was with him when he had his meeting, that the traffic is detouring from Highway 15 and they're bypassing the town. And the businesses are suffering

quite a great deal because of it.

And furthermore, he should also be aware that there's three major grain terminals along that stretch of highway located at Semans, Nokomis, and Amazon. And the trucking companies have brought forward complaints to my office that their drivers no longer want to haul to these terminals due to the wear and tear that's placed on their vehicles for having to travel on that highway.

The tourism industry has dropped in the Nokomis area. The town of Nokomis used to benefit from the location close to Manitou Beach and the mineral spa. And as I mentioned before, the business owners are now experiencing a significant decline in revenue since the travellers are taking other routes.

But the most significant problem is the safety factor. Nokomis has a health centre and Watrous has a hospital, and the ambulance drivers are saying that they have been forced unnecessarily to increase their travel time due to the condition of the highway, which puts the patients that they have at risk.

The school buses are unable to avoid travel on the highway and that has been a concern of a number of parents that have phoned my office. And motorists in general have run a risk when travelling on that particular stretch of Highway 15.

So this session I know the minister has taken note that I've read petitions almost every day. And the signatures on those petitions are a good indication that it is a well-travelled highway by a number of citizens from our province and from out of our province.

And I would almost be able to bet money on the fact that anyone that took the highway because it appeared on the map to be the quickest and the most efficient route across the province would never make the mistake of travelling it again.

So I would like to read in the record just a few of the letters and faxes and e-mails that my office in Lanigan receives about this stretch of highway. And then I would like the minister to give us some sort of timeline, some sort of hope of when this highway will be addressed and, hopefully, be fixed in an adequate fashion.

So the one letter states, and I quote:

This stretch of highway has gotten considerably worse since last summer. Someone is going to severely damage a vehicle. If you don't watch it you may lose control. Something has got to be done with this road. It is used for the school buses. If it is not properly fixed, there's going to be a serious accident on it.

And that's from Darlene Gross.

When you travel Highway 15 west of Semans to Highway 20 — you certainly have your eyes opened. The road is full of holes and it is washboardy in many places. This part of the highway is a disgrace. Due to the highway conditions, many semi's are taking alternate routes, thus putting additional stress on our R.M. roads.

And that was written by Gilbert Murney, the mayor of Semans.

Fatality rate will be high due to inexperienced driver, weather conditions, heavy truck traffic . . . high speeds. This is not the Federal Governments total problem, nor a previous provincial governments excuse. This is right now! Let's keep the pavement we have and fix the roads in this province and not go back in time. In the 1960's there . . . (were) a million people in this province . . . (when) the roads were built. In the year 2002 we have a million, we should be able to maintain or better the quality of these roads.

By Walter Sagen.

In a phone call to my office a woman by the name of Darlene stated that, "this highway is in really, really bad shape," and her daughter just had her tire sliced right on the pavement. And fortunately, we were glad to hear that the car didn't roll when that happened.

Another phone call dated April 23 was from a woman by the name of Lynn who just wanted me . . . to inform me that there had been a rollover the day before on Highway 15 and she felt that the vehicle had just simply lost control because of the condition of the highway.

So I would really like this minister to give the community some hope, some sort of timeline of when this highway will be not just patched. It obviously hasn't worked. And when will the highway be seriously addressed and fixed?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I appreciate the concerns around Highway 15 and partly because the day that I went up to meet with the business people in Nokomis, I travelled the route from Semans across. And we found at no more than 80 kilometres an hour that it was quite safe to travel on. However, that road is not in good shape. It needs repair, we acknowledge that.

It's very important to note the work that has been done on Highway 15, noting that we recognize it as an important corridor and to also look at the work that is currently scheduled. You'll see from . . . is it Melville right up to Raymore has been increased in terms of its ability to handle a heavier load and is a much better highway than it was before.

We've also . . . you'll see from Nokomis further over, we're getting repairs done this upcoming year, further to the west.

We have been working with the Area Transportation Planning Committee in that area trying to set priorities to make sure that where we're investing the dollars that we have, we're getting the best possible returns. So we're doing this section by section.

And the other thing that we're doing, and it has been very, very successful, is working with the RMs (rural municipality), not only in this area but in other areas of the province where we're able to develop alternate roads. We're able to partner with them to increase funding for particular stretches of roads that are a concern. And so there are discussions going on with the RMs as well.

And you'll note that it's probably a parallel to the kind of work

that has been done over in the area of Highway 51 where we've got agreement with the RMs and we're seeing some good work being done. And it's our anticipation that with successful talks we'll be able to move ahead on this section between Semans and Highway 20 and we should have some pretty good roads there.

In terms of actual timeline, that'll partly depend on the discussion negotiations with the RMs involved.

Ms. Harpauer: — I would just like to mention to the minister that if you drive slow enough it's quite safe to go across the middle of your field too, but that isn't quite what the community is looking for. And that was definitely the point that I had made with the ambulance needing to use that highway is that they've had to slow down considerably and it's at the risk of the patients involved.

When you say, depending on how the talks go, can I just get you to clarify so you are no longer looking at addressing adequately fixing the highway, now you're just going to negotiate alternative roads with the RMs and ignore the highway issues?

(16:30)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think it's important to note that in the discussions in terms of alternate routes, that's not the priority that the RMs have. It is to do — as we've done with 51 where we don't have good alternate routes — is to work in partnership with them to build it.

What we're doing on the other sections as we move further west from Nokomis is building those to structural pavement; we've . . . working with the RMs as well to get agreement to build that section between Semans and No. 20 up to that standard as well.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, and to your officials, welcome. I have a question on two roads. I guess that makes it two questions then.

First one is on No. 6 Highway from Watson towards Naicam. It's a well-travelled road, and I'm sure that you're well aware that Watson has the sign that says the crossroads of Saskatchewan. The highway between No. 5 and No. 6 join right at Watson and they really are the hub of this area of our province.

And No. 6 Highway was well constructed a number of years ago but it's starting to require some repairs. And I've had a number of people who ride motorcycles telling me they wonder if they can even get down it because of the cracks in the highway.

Can you tell me when that highway is on the list for upgrading and repair?

The Deputy Chair: — Why is the member for Estevan on her feet?

Ms. Eagles: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this honoured Assembly some very important guests from my constituency. Seated in the east gallery are 14 students, grade 6 students from the Westview Elementary School in Estevan. And today they are accompanied by their teacher, Marilyn McCutcheon as well as chaperones Rick Rohatton, Wanda Wishart, Linda Henderson, and Diane Goodmanson.

And I would just like to let them know that what is happening at this time in the Assembly is it's the estimates for the Department of Highways. And that gives members of the Assembly a chance to question the Minister of Highways on things that are happening in their constituencies regarding specific roads and things. And given the conditions of the roads, we are usually inundated with inquiries to make.

So I will be meeting with the students and the teacher and the chaperones in a few minutes. And I look forward to that very much. So I ask all members in . . . ask all members to join me in welcoming these guests of mine from Estevan. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. I think I'd like to join in welcoming the guests from Estevan.

And in response to the question regarding the highway from Watson to Naicam, this is an asphalt/concrete pavement that is just showing its age, basically, and this year it is not scheduled for work other than regular maintenance work on it.

And at the end of this year it will go into — we recognize the condition it's in — it will go into the work with all the rest of the major highways and it will be categorized and a schedule set for when it will be brought again up to standard.

But it's basically just showing its aging at this point; it's not in the schedule for this year other than routine maintenance.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The other road that I've had concerns brought to my attention about is No. 667. This highway is one with the feed mill now that has just been opened or will be open in the middle of July.

And when the owner was determining whether he should actually build his feed mill, one of his concerns was the road. A large number of trucks actually use this road and last week when it rained, it was just about impassable. This mill is actually . . . it's used for many of the livestock for the hog barns in the area and it's causing great concern for the owner.

And I know that when the Premier was out in this constituency

last week, he'd indicated that about 2 miles of that road is going to be built this year. Well 2 miles is . . . the road is going to start nowhere and go nowhere. It's not enough. If we're actually going to be building it, it's better to actually finish it, at least get it to the place where this mill can be used.

So the minister is . . . the constituent is asking when this road is going to be built so at least the mill can be gotten to by the large number of trucks that are trying to use this facility.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. I appreciate the member's concern and question around 667.

It is important to point out though, that this is a municipal road and that it was through the heavy-haul program and the administration of the Government Relations department that it was designated as heavy-haul and these 3.2 kilometres will be paved this year.

And it's under the municipal road, and the agreements that are made there, that it will be furthered. And in terms of budget you could direct that to Municipal when they're up for estimates.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the minister, welcome, and to your officials. Mr. Minister, I have a number of questions regarding highways in our area.

But I'd like to start off with a question that I haven't had a clear answer yet, and that was the gravel haul to Rocanville. I believe Langenburg Redi-Mix had that haul, it was a winter haul. And a number of concerns raised by a couple of local contractors in regards to even their ability to tender on this call.

And I think at the time, if I'm not mistaken, they were informed that the call was or the tender was put out on the Net. And as a result of the fact that they're really not . . . one contractor is not upgraded with a computerized system or network and isn't on the Net, they missed that tender.

But the other, the question I would like to ask is: what avenues does the minister, does your department follow up in releasing tenders so that contractors have the same access and ability to tender on a project like that?

And the other question that came up very clearly — because in checking it I believe the contractor was actually out of Manitoba — the question that arose is: would local contractors or contractors that actually have Saskatchewan licences have a preference over out-of-province contracts or how does the department handle these types of tenders?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Chair, the process of tendering has . . . really, we are not exclusive in terms of whether it can be Saskatchewan or Manitoba contractors.

But there are other issues that are important in the issue of tendering, particularly for materials, because we have to have particular specific quality materials for different jobs.

It's also important to note that a detailed answer was provided in writing to the member on this earlier, I'm told. And so, if there are more depth of detail that's required, we can again make that available.

But I think it's also important to note that when the tenders are let, that the information does go out on the Net. And Saskatchewan has made tremendous inroads in terms of making high-speed Internet accessible throughout Saskatchewan. There are of course contractors who don't have the Net, but that's not the only place it goes out. It's also out in the newspapers and so contractors do have access to the papers and can tender from there.

But there are a number of detailed aspects to this which we'd be quite willing to provide in written form as well.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and to the minister; yes, Mr. Minister, there was some information that was . . . that came via letter. But there was a question that still wasn't really answered and the answer regarding the contractor having a licence to operate in Saskatchewan, is that a requirement of out-of-province contractors that they actually have a licence to operate in the province as well?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — For out-of-province contractors there are some important conditions that have to be met. There is no licence involved in it but Department of Finance has some conditions that must be met before they can contract in the province. And that is that there are taxes on fuel that have to be complied with and there are also taxes on equipment that is brought in, sales taxes on equipment that is brought in and used.

I'm told that in this particular case the contractor from Manitoba has complied, has worked in this province previously, and has met the standards in terms of Finance's request for tax payment.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, thank you, Mr. Minister. That's exactly what the individuals in the community and the contractors were asking of me. Because they basically were saying they wanted to make sure that everyone's playing on the same level playing field. And that, that I believe answers that question. So I appreciate that. So that we can indeed say, yes, everyone has, and they recognize that if they've got access to, then whoever's . . . has the best qualified tender gets it as long as we're all bidding with the same . . . on the same level playing field. And that's the important feature.

Mr. Minister, regarding No. 8 Highway, and I want to say that the people in the Moosomin area, Moosomin and Maryfield area, are certainly appreciative of the fact that No. 8 Highway will, I trust, be completed in this construction year. Maybe not all the pavement will be down or the dust-free surface.

A couple of questions did come up though in regard to the grade through the Pipestone Creek area. And I believe in a couple of spots the grade was actually elevated substantially versus what it was in the past. And the question arose as to the amount of fill that was used on that grade and whether or not was necessary to increase that grade as much as it was versus the level of the grade on Highway No. 8 through Pipestone Creek in the past.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could respond to that. And as well . . . And let us know what the . . . you're hoping for a completion date on that construction project. I think, I have a feeling that it probably took a little longer than what was

anticipated. I'm not exactly sure if we weren't anticipating completion last year. Certainly it was wetter in the spring to start with.

But if we could just answer those questions and let us know why the grade was raised as much as it was and whether or not the department's anticipating that this will . . . project will be completed this year.

(16:45)

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly, our page — not page, excuse me — one of our interns is sitting in the gallery, Wendy Moellenbeck. And with her is her father and her sister — or perhaps I'm misjudging a little bit and perhaps it's her mother, but she looks certainly young enough to be her sister.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to introduce those all to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the government caucus, I too would like to welcome you to the Legislative Assembly. The page . . . or the interns, I'm sorry, is a new experience for us as legislators. It's been very exciting and I want to tell you that we very much enjoyed having your daughter with us here. It was a good experience for us and I certainly hope it was for her as well.

So thank you very much, and welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Follow up on the last question. Just to give you the figures that 81 per cent of the contracts that were awarded were in-province contracts and 19 per cent were out-of-province contracts in the '01-02 year.

So onto Highway No. 8. The issue of the grade is there was a technical briefing given to the area transportation planning committee that . . . and it was quite detailed, to help them understand the amount of grade that was put in, material that was put in to build the grade.

But very briefly, it is that on the south side there's high subjectivity to slides and so you don't want to cut into the slope very much. And so then you have to bring in the fill in order to get a grade that meets standards because it is a fairly substantial valley. So that's the basic reason why the amount of fill is put in there.

And finally, in terms of the projected deadline, it is our hope that this surfacing will be completed by the end of this construction season but there are vagaries that could make that not possible. But it is our hope, our intention to have surfacing done by the end of this season.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:50.