

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Clerk: — It is my duty to advise the House that Mr. Speaker will not be present to open this morning's sitting, but he will be here presently. Thank you.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of the snowmobile industry in Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to recognize the financial savings that could be made by contracting the Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association to groom provincial trails, and obtain funding for this through the sale of provincially owned grooming equipment, mandatory trail permits on Crown land and provincial parks, and the attachment of trail permits to snowmobile registrations.

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

This petition is signed by residents of Lloydminster, Livelong, and other communities in the province, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the deplorable 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 and make necessary repairs to Highway 58 in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

This petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Shamrock and Coderre.

I so present.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that it's too late to roll back the premium hikes in crop insurance for this year, I'm going to present this petition in hopes that it will have some impact for decisions for the upcoming year. The prayer, Mr. Speaker, reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by producers from Riverhurst, Fort Qu'Appelle, and Eastend. Thank you.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, constituents in my area have asked that I present these petitions regarding the Kyoto accord on their behalf today. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

And this is signed by people from Estevan, Torquay, Steelman, Lampman, and other places within my constituency.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy and throughout the province that are concerned about the Kyoto accord. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

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

And the petitions are signed on behalf . . . by residents of Bienfait, Asquith, Brooks, Alberta, Calgary, Battleford, North Battleford, Regina, Bengough, Weyburn, McTaggart, Moose Jaw, Ogema, Bengough, and there's several pages of Bengough.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise on behalf of constituents concerned about the implications for our part of the province of the Kyoto accord. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

All of the petitioners today, Mr. Speaker, are from the city of Swift Current.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise with a petition from citizens from the Southwest that are concerned with the impact, economic impact of Kyoto. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is also signed by the good citizens of Swift Current.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens concerned about actions of Crop Insurance.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps for Saskatchewan Crop Insurance to reassess the grasshopper spray penalty assessed to farmers in 2002, and further that the government review the definition of viable farming practices outlined in the present Sask Crop Insurance policy.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Hanley.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens concerned about the effect of the Kyoto accord on the Saskatchewan economy. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

Signed by the good citizens of Biggar and district.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of constituents. 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 care 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 Regional Health Authority.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Bulyea and Duval.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 169, 437, and 438.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Members, it is my privilege today to introduce two very special people to you.

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

This morning I would like to introduce to you, Dr. Dmytro Cipywnyk, who earlier today received a state award, the Order for Merit, from the Government of Ukraine. The order is the highest honour a non-resident of Ukraine can receive. He has received this honour for his tireless contributions to Canada-Ukraine co-operation through his involvement in many community and professional organizations that promote Ukrainian-Canadian relations.

He is accompanied by his wife, Ms. Maura Gillis-Cipywnyk and I welcome them both to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — (The hon. member spoke for a time in Ukrainian.)

I would also . . . It is also my pleasure to introduce His Excellency, Dr. Yri Scherbak, ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, who is visiting us today specifically for the purpose of conferring recognition to Dr. Cipywnyk on behalf of the Government of Ukraine. Dr. Scherbak.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — And accompanying them are a group that were part of the ceremony and I'd like to put their names into the record. And would the people please stand when I mention them and we will recognize them at the end.

Here we have with us today, Mr. Orest . . . Ostap Skrypnyk and Nadia Prokopchuk. Ostap is the national secretary of the Ukrainian-Canadian Committee.

Dr. Bohdon Rozdilsky and John Rozdilsky; Mr. and Mrs. Jayne Paluck — pardon me, Ms. Jayne Paluck and Mr. Paluck; Mr. Paul Ortynsky and Doreen Ortynsky; Ed Lysk; Gerald and Cathy Luciuk; Terry and Vera Labach; Father Methodius Kushko; Eugene Krenosky and Mrs. Krenosky; Boris and Marie Kischuk; Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kachkowski; Iris Feist; Adrian Boyko and Mrs. Sonia Boyko; and with them also is Debbie Albus from Intergovernmental Affairs.

I welcome you all here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, while not traditional in the introduction of members, I do want to take this opportunity, and I think I will be joined by the Leader of the Opposition, in

rising on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan to congratulate . . . to offer our congratulations to Dr. Cipywnyk for the high honour that has been presented him today by the nation of the Ukraine.

Dr. Cipywnyk today has received Ukraine's highest order. It is rare, I understand, for this order to be presented outside of the Ukraine and we, as government, share congratulations with you, Dr. Cipywnyk.

In addition to this prestigious honour, Dr. Cipywnyk was invested, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in the Order of Canada in 1992. He has received the Canada 125 Commemorative Medal. In 1995, he was awarded the Shevchenko Medal by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Mr. Speaker, he is currently the Chair of our Advisory Committee on Saskatchewan - Ukrainian Relations.

We all know, in this province, the vast contribution that the doctor has made to health care in our province, the contribution he has made to Ukrainian-Canadian relations, the contribution that he makes to . . . continues to make to Saskatchewan-Ukrainian relations.

And so, our congratulations to you, Doctor.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And on behalf of the official opposition of the Saskatchewan Party, I too would like to join with the Premier and welcome our special guests in the legislature today.

Particularly we want to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Dr. Yri Scherbak, from the Ukraine. We would also of course extend our congratulations to Dr. Cipywnyk and his wife on the prestigious award of one of the Ukraine's highest medals of honour, a truly great honour for a resident of Saskatchewan, from outside of the Ukraine, and I think a very fitting honour given Dr. Cipywnyk's association with the Ukraine over the years.

Also like to welcome other members of the Canadian-Ukrainian community, residents of Saskatchewan who are here to share in this honour.

Dr. Cipywnyk's achievements are many. He's been involved in health care, in international relations. He has been an outstanding example of a great citizen of our province, of our country, and of our world. And we obviously are very pleased that you have been honoured in this way today. We extend our congratulations to you.

We extend our thanks to you for such excellent service to this province, to Canadian-Ukrainian relations, and to the many activities and challenges that you have applied yourself to.

Congratulations from the official opposition.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:15)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise in the Legislative Assembly this morning on behalf of a number of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) who are of Ukrainian descent and I think on behalf of so many people in Saskatchewan who have a Ukrainian ancestry.

I want to first of all extend my congratulations to Dr. Cipywnyk on this prestigious award and secondly to have Dr. Yri Scherbak, as ambassador, back again in the city of Regina and in Saskatchewan. I had the pleasure of listening to Dr. Scherbak nearly two years ago and I'm very impressed with your comments. And I welcome you again.

And I welcome all the people in the gallery. I'm not going to mention individual names except for my two constituents. Paul and Doreen Ortynsky have travelled from Canora to be here this morning and to celebrate this joyous occasion.

And as we near the festive season, Mr. Speaker, we heard this morning that we will look forward to a very merry Christmas, and on behalf of the many people of Ukrainian descent as well:

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

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a special day for multiculturalism in the legislature. I just want to mention my own Ukrainian grandmother came here all by herself when she was 16, with not a word of English. And I think that's the kind of roots a lot of people had coming from the old country to Canada — what we called the old country — but I very much empathize with how difficult it must have been at that time for her to do that. So I have a place in my heart when we recognize you today.

And along with that, we have a school visit from Connaught School and this is a very smart group of students. They speak two languages. This is the French immersion class and you know, Mr. Speaker, I went to the school and I discussed legislation, budgets, and government services and I was just amazed at how much these young people knew about the work of government.

Now although I don't . . . I'm a little bit cautious to do this, but I do want to recognize my granddaughter. Serena, can you stand up? And as you can see, she's grown a little.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — And accompanying them today are teacher Deena Combres, parents Jim Mitchell, Ted Delanghe, Chris Harbron, and Susan Birley. And I guaranteed them everybody would be on their best behaviour so we'll get a report card after. Okay. Thank you for coming.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of the Assembly I'd like to introduce 22 grade 7 and 8 students from Milestone High School. Mr. Speaker, you'll be quite familiar with these students as we made a tour to the school about two weeks ago when we worked

through some legislation in the classroom and passed a couple of Bills. It was a very interesting, interesting visit.

And I was most impressed, as I'm sure you were, at the preparation work that was done and what a good job that the class had done. I want to congratulate the teacher, David Hawkins, for doing such a great job. And also no stranger to this House is Judy Bradley who is sitting . . . and also sat in on that session and probably, with lots of experience in passing legislation, also did some prep work as well.

Mr. Speaker, accompanying these grade 7 and 8 students are Rod Cole and Tammy Jones who made the trip in from Milestone.

And I was thinking, Mr. Speaker, and we mentioned it when we were at the school visit, how Milestone High School has had maybe a bit of a penchant for putting people into the public light. Mr. Ralph Goodale, the hon. minister of the federal Crown, went to school in Milestone as did Judy Bradley who was the minister of Highways in this, in the NDP (New Democratic Party) government.

Mr. Speaker, and with that it is with a little bit of nervousness that I look towards the future. But I guess if I am defeated, it will be in the Sask Party nomination by one of these students.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are three people seated in the east gallery that I take pleasure in introducing to you.

First is Rob Norris. Rob is coordinator of communications and program development for the University of Saskatchewan International. As such, he's marketing Saskatchewan skills around the world. He's also — I'd ask him to please stand — he's also the Liberal candidate in Saskatoon Eastview.

With him today are Curtis Kimpton who is his business manager and is also just completing a term as the governor of the Kinsmen organization for Saskatchewan.

And for the third individual, I would say for the benefit of the Minister of Health that it's not normally given to us to know our end. But if he would like to know his end, he need only turn around to see the Liberal candidate from Regina Lakeview, Mr. David Brundige.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also welcome Mr. Dave Brundige here, and I have done that before as he is one of my constituents. And I know that this latest venture into politics for my friend is causing a lot of difficulties at home in that his wife has worked hard on my campaign for a number of years. So . . .

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to introduce a nominated candidate for the Sask Party, Mr. Dan Thibault, who's sitting in the east gallery.

People in the Regina Wascana Plains are quite familiar with Dan Thibault as he came within a whisker of sitting in this House after the last election. Now a whisker will have been shaven off this time and he'll be firmly seated on that side of the House as a Saskatchewan Party government member after the next provincial election.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's another good news story for Saskatchewan — one of those stories where the simple, unadorned facts tell us all that we need to know in one more way, that the future is wide open in Saskatchewan.

The other day I was happy to announce to the Assembly that a record number of natural gas wells had been drilled in Saskatchewan. Today I'm just as pleased to tell members that so far this year the land sale of Crown petroleum and natural gas rights has exceeded \$100 million. The December sale generated \$16.7 million, bringing the total this year to \$102.9 million.

The dollars are good, of course, and even more encouraging I think is that included in the December sale is a record-high 51 exploration licences. This means that the industry is encouraged by our recent change to its tax schedule; that it is optimistic about the potential reserves still to be discovered. And it means more prosperity for local communities and more jobs for Saskatchewan workers.

That's a plan in action, Mr. Speaker. A slogan didn't get these results; a plan did. Our plan is working and our future is wide open.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

References to Matters in Litigation

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, over the past several days during question period both the Premier and the CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) minister have refused to answer questions regarding the government's ill-fated venture into the potato business.

On Wednesday the minister specifically cited the *sub judice* convention as grounds for refusing to answer these questions. Simply put, this is a gross misinterpretation of the *sub judice* convention. Section 507(2) of Beauchesne's states:

In civil cases the (*sub judice*) convention does not apply until the matter has reached trial stage.

Furthermore, section 510 in Beauchesne's states:

The Speaker has pointed out "that the House has never allowed the *sub judice* convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest . . ."

The loss of 28 million taxpayers' dollars due to this government's mismanagement of its potato business and its apparent attempts to disguise the true nature of this deal are most certainly matters vital to the public interest. Therefore it is unacceptable for ministers to cite the *sub judice* convention like some parliamentary version of the US (United States) Fifth Amendment to absolve them of their responsibility to be accountable to the Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan.

At best, this is a misguided interpretation of the *sub judice* convention. At worst, it is yet another attempt by the NDP government to cover up the facts behind this loss of \$28 million.

I trust the Premier will begin to answer questions again, and I hope he would direct his ministers to do the same.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Increase in Regina's Housing Starts

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the doom and gloom coming from the opposition, Saskatchewan's future and Regina's future is indeed wide open.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — People are responding. Mr. Speaker, Regina's housing starts are up over 10 per cent from a year ago. There have been over 619 housing starts so far this year and I wish to point out that the trend is gaining momentum. By way of example, in November, the last month for which there are statistics, there's a 42 per cent increase over November last year.

Mr. Speaker, housing starts are a sign of a strong economy. The people of Regina, the people of Saskatchewan, are actually way ahead of us all. They do know that the economy is growing and they're showing it by building houses, by moving into houses. They know that Regina is a terrific, terrific city to raise a family in, and they're responding by putting down firm and permanent roots here, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to congratulate everyone involved in Regina's housing industry, both the builders and the purchasers and people who live in these housings. Our future is growing. We have a wide open future and I, for one, am going to be very proud to be part of that wide open future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Humboldt Soccer Teams Excel

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Humboldt indoor soccer teams have one again excelled in their sport.

The under-16 Hurricane girls team took part in the annual SISCO (Saskatoon indoor soccer competition) indoor soccer tournament held recently in Saskatoon. There were a total of 132 teams at that tournament, with the participants ranging in the age from 12 to 18 years. Now the under-16 Hurricane girls team came away undefeated and returned with the gold medal.

They will attend a tournament in Calgary from January 2 to 5.

And the Humboldt Hurricane under-18 boys team also won gold at the SISCO indoor soccer tournament. This was the second year in a row for the gold medal accomplishment. Strong goalkeeping, good defensive and offensive play by the whole team was key to their victory.

The under-12 Hurricanes entered a division 3 soccer tournament also held in Saskatoon, and they advanced to the gold medal game undefeated. The final game was tied at 4 and was decided after 10 minutes of overtime with a shootout. The Hurricanes settled for silver.

The coaches credit the successful weekend to good ball control, great team effort, and fantastic fan support.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the players and coaches for their accomplishments and for doing their very best. We're extremely proud of you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government of Saskatchewan Web Site

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday my colleague from Saskatoon Southeast mentioned the Internet and its role in promoting education and information to students and ordinary citizens alike.

I'm happy to announce today, Mr. Speaker, that the government is making it easier for students and citizens to find government information and services on-line. The government has just redesigned its central Web site, which includes quick links to feature areas and major initiatives of particular interest to the public. The site also has a fresh new look, but also maintains its basic navigational features which have proven very popular with Internet users.

Just as we know that the future is wide open, Mr. Speaker, we believe in open, accountable, visible government. These days that includes electronic visibility and our intent is to make electronic access to government information and services as effortless as possible.

The Web site is a quick and easy entry to services available from various government departments and agencies. This site features direct links to business, investment, and tourism information and provides quick access to frequently requested information and services, such as birth certificates, licences, and health cards.

I invite you and all citizens to visit the site at www.gov.sk.ca. The government is at your fingertips, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

Carrot River Active Living Complex

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the residents of the town of Carrot River and surrounding area are an innovative, hard working, and very determined people.

Over the years they've had many services stripped from their town by the NDP government, including their acute care hospital. However instead of simply accepting the fact that their hospital has been taken away from them and leaving a new building to sit vacant, they worked to convert the former Carrot River hospital into an active living complex.

This facility will feature 20 housing units for people who feel that it is not yet time for them to be in a long-term care facility but are unable to cope in their own home. Project organizers are proud to point out that no government money has been provided or sought for this project. The committee says that one reason they wanted to avoid any government involvement because it would mean increased paperwork, red tape, and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Carrot River would rather find innovative fundraising ideas than to have to deal with the immense bureaucracy of this NDP government. They have surpassed their fundraising goal of \$100,000 and to date have raised nearly 110,000. They are planning for the opening of the facility in early 2003. They have held luncheons, a trade fair, an amateur night, and other fundraisers.

I would ask all members to join with me in congratulating the members of the Carrot River Active Living Committee and other volunteers who have devoted so much of their time and effort in order for this project to become a reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Community Schools

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that one of the very first designated community schools in all of Saskatchewan was Kitchener Community School, located in my constituency of Regina Elphinstone; a school, by the way, that I had the privilege to attend.

I am also very proud that six other schools in Elphinstone are community schools. And today we are joined by a group from Connaught Community School. I'm sure they will all agree with me when I say community schools are very cool. Why so cool, Mr. Speaker? Community schools are those in which the government provides extra financial assistance so that parents and the school community can provide enhanced programming such as pre-kindergarten, nutrition programs, cultural activities, adult education, and training opportunities.

As the Minister of Learning has said, and I quote:

We know that the support provided through community schools pays off in long-term benefits.

Put another way, Mr. Speaker, we are making certain that our future is wide open. I have seen the value of this program first hand and I am pleased to acknowledge that our government is providing funding for five new community schools this year, bringing the total to 88. This number has more than doubled in the last two years and now includes elementary and secondary schools right across the province.

The new schools are in Yorkton, Cando, Canwood, St. Louis, and Green Lake. This is more good news for Saskatchewan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

References to Matters in Litigation

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the NDP government has been ducking questions about the \$28 million blunder it made in the potato business.

To try to absolve themselves of responsibility, the minister responsible for CIC has grossly misinterpreted the *sub judice* convention. Mr. Speaker, his response has been nothing but a weak-kneed excuse. It's been concocted so that both the Premier and the minister can avoid answering proper questions. The questions that we are asking deal with the policies and the actions of the NDP government — actions that cost Saskatchewan taxpayers \$28 million.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier and will his government quit ducking their responsibilities and start answering questions today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue, not only for the operation of this House but also for the operation of courts and the operation of law.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of all members — and the Supreme Court of Canada has recently restated this — it is the responsibility of all members to pay particular attention to matters that are before the courts and to take every step that they don't, that they don't in any way, Mr. Speaker, intentionally or unintentionally affect those proceedings, Mr. Speaker.

What I have advised as the legal adviser to the government on this matter is that these proceedings are before the courts — are before the courts.

The member from Swift Current talked about documents which were presented by plaintiffs. They must therefore be of some importance to their case, Mr. Speaker, and it is proper for us to pay due caution to this matter and to ensure that we don't prejudice these matters.

And, Mr. Speaker, on that basis, ministers will not be answering questions on matters which are before the courts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a matter that has not gone to trial yet and it's a civil matter. And this government has a responsibility to answer questions. And we've had rulings — many rulings in the past — that indicate that they are accountable and have every right and every freedom to answer those questions. Mr. Speaker, instead they're acting like Enron executives hiding behind the US Fifth Amendment.

Mr. Speaker, we asked the NDP, why did they call it a partnership when it wasn't a partnership? They refused to answer. We asked the Minister of Industry . . . we asked why the Minister of Industry took the wrong information to cabinet in 1997. The Minister of Industry refused to answer. We asked the NDP why they covered up the truth about this deal. Mr. Speaker, they refuse to answer. We asked the NDP why they drained nearly \$4 million out of Rafferty and Ducks Unlimited trust accounts to pay for this mess. They refused to answer. Mr. Speaker, we asked the Premier if he thought that this was acceptable, and even he refused to answer.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan deserve answers. When is the NDP going to start answering the questions that they're supposed to answer?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The responsibility to not interfere with the appropriate, fair passage of justice is one that members on this side of the House treat seriously. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have obviously decided that they're prepared to risk the fairness of that trial for the purposes of raising these matters here in the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, that is a choice they . . . that is a choice they are free to make. That is a choice they are free to make, Mr. Speaker. But as the members know, this is not . . . this is not the normal course of procedure.

Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a civil case, at a stage of proceedings very similar to this, ruled that it was inappropriate for members to speak — members — ministers and members, Mr. Speaker. We will stick to that.

The member may be entirely irresponsible in this matter; that's up to him. But we will be responsible on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government Participation in Potato Industry

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear from this week that what the Minister of Justice said is true. This government refuses to take any responsibility at all for the loss of 28 million taxpayer dollars

Mr. Speaker, one answer that the minister did give this week — the minister for CIC — one answer that he did give was, check the annual reports. He said, it's all in the annual reports; there's no secrets here, Mr. Speaker — except that it isn't.

Mr. Speaker, we checked the annual reports. In 1998 cabinet received an Ernst & Young audit that said this deal that they characterized as a partnership was not a partnership. It was set up to look like a partnership to avoid international trade laws, to get around their own construction tendering policy, and to create the optics for Saskatchewan people that there was a private partner, when there was no private partner.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister. Could he please show us in the 1998 Sask Water annual report where any of that is mentioned?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'm interested and have been observing over the last week the comments that have been made by the member from Swift Current — and his theatrics of this morning by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker — where he says clearly that this is a \$28 million blunder.

Then he goes on to say that this has been a loss to the Saskatchewan government, to the people of Saskatchewan, for \$28 million. And then, Mr. Speaker, I received this week, Mr. Speaker, I receive a letter from the industry. And this is what the industry says, Mr. Speaker. They say:

Some people don't want to hear the word "potatoes" . . . Harvest was a pain this year but yields were pretty good, around 15 tonnes per acre. That adds up to about \$20 million off 4,000 acres. It would take 250,000 acres of dryland (Mr. Speaker, in drought) . . . Those spuds are going to Manitoba . . . (they're going to) Alberta, (Mr. Speaker, they're going to) Northwestern USA and (they're going) . . . to PEI.

And they go on to say about 200 people are working at harvest time, Mr. Speaker.

And I say this, Mr. Speaker, to the members opposite. Mr. Speaker, I say this. Taxpayers are on the hook for 28 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the people in the potato industry of this province are telling us that far from any help, this NDP government and the squandering of 28 million taxpayers' dollars has set that industry back, Mr. Speaker, has almost destroyed that industry, Mr. Speaker. That's what they tell . . . that's what they're telling us.

Mr. Speaker, the question was for the minister. He himself said, check the annual reports. The minister responsible for CIC said that, and that's what we're talking about today. We're talking about Sask Water's annual reports.

What about the 1999 annual report he told the media and others to check? Well in 1999, the premier received a memo from Sask Water saying that Sask Water was effectively insolvent. The memo said, quote:

Without any financial assistance from our shareholders, (that would be CIC), Sask Water will experience an increase in its debt to equity ratio to 80 per cent plus over the next two years. While Sask Water is taking steps to minimize expenditures and increase revenues (it says), neither of these courses of action will be able to address the size of the financial problem (Mr. Speaker).

None of that is in the 1999 report. Will the minister responsible stand up and show us where is it in this 1999 annual report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just stands on his feet and says that the industry has decreased its value in the province over the last several years. Mr. Speaker, the industry, the potato industry, since 1998 in Saskatchewan has gone straight up, Mr. Speaker, is where they've gone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — And I say to the members opposite this. The fundamental question that we're debating today, Mr. Speaker, is who . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, the fundamental debate in this House today, and this week, has been, who is it that's investing in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

They say \$28 million today is a blunder, is what the Leader of the Opposition says — a blunder, he says — in Saskatchewan, to rural Saskatchewan.

Where are those \$28 million invested, Mr. Speaker? They're invested in the potato industry in those communities, Mr. Speaker. And are they working for Saskatchewan potato growers today, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely they're working for Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that the industry could be that much better than it is today were it not for the NDP government, notwithstanding that fact, imagine the spectre, Mr. Speaker, of any government, of this NDP government, justifying — justifying — what they did, justifying covering up the real nature of this potato deal from the US Trade Commission, Mr. Speaker, from the taxpayers, to avoid their own union-only tendering policy. That Deputy Premier stands up and defends it, Mr. Speaker. That is disgraceful, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — And the people of the province will hold them accountable, I believe.

Mr. Speaker, here's a very quick question for the minister, a very quick question, Mr. Speaker. Did Sask Water meet all of the legislative requirements in terms of orders in council, all of the legislative requirements for the construction of potato storage facilities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you and this House what's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker. What's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker, is this party policy from the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, and this is what it says:

Under the . . .

And this is resolution DG0103, and it states this. Under the Saskatchewan . . . under an SP government:

. . . there will be no direct investments or grants given to business.

There would be no investment made in jobs. And there would be no investments made in ethanol, Mr. Speaker.

And I say this, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

(10:45)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The Leader of the Opposition stands up a minute ago and he says . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Members. Order. I must be able to hear the responses, members.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition starts out his questions today by saying, what's your policy; you have no policy on investment and you have no action, Mr. Speaker.

Well we have a policy, Mr. Speaker. This is his words, investment in Saskatchewan, exactly what he said, Mr. Speaker. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, in the agricultural rural Saskatchewan community, we are growing it. And when members opposite say that we've invested \$28 million in an industry today, that's a blunder, I say to the members opposite, in your part of the world today in industry and agriculture, in irrigation, those facilities are helping to grow the industry, Mr. Speaker, in spades.

And I say to the member opposite, you have not . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I remind the minister in his response to continue the entire response addressing his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Wall: — The question was very serious. The question was, did Sask Water meet their legal requirements when they invested and risked millions of taxpayers' dollars in these storage sheds? The Ernst & Young report says that they did not, Mr. Speaker. That's the answer to the question. Ernst & Young points out that Sask Water must obtain cabinet approval for any equity investment or loan over \$250,000. This did not happen with the first three storage facilities built in '97 for \$8.4 million, Mr. Speaker. Ernst & Young says because of this an order in council was probably required. But this never happened.

Mr. Speaker, how did the NDP allow an \$8.4 million deal to go ahead without an order in council? Not only were they deceiving Saskatchewan people and the trade commission, they were operating illegally, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister stand in his place and tell us why in the world the government would do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The members opposite talk about a \$28

million investment in potato industry in their part of the world, in the Lucky Lake area, as being a blunder, Mr. Speaker. They say it's been a blunder.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, let's examine what ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) has said in this House. Let's examine what ACRE has said in this House, Mr. Speaker. They said that two of three primary goals, Mr. Speaker, is to put money into infrastructure and to put money into capital, Mr. Speaker. And today, this government put \$28 million into infrastructure and into capital, into the potato industry, Mr. Speaker. And today that industry, on the recommendations of ACRE, Mr. Speaker, are going upwards, Mr. Speaker. The potato industry is going like that.

Now why did that happen? Because we made an investment in the potato industry of which ACRE says — ACRE says — we should and we are. And that's the difference, Mr. Speaker, between the people on this side of the House and the people on that side of the House, is that we have a plan, Mr. Speaker, to grow the economy. They have a slogan, Mr. Speaker, only.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this has been a very, very . . . a serious week, I think, for the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. I think it's been very serious.

What cabinet documents have portrayed . . . What cabinet documents have portrayed is that a minister brought a cabinet item to the cabinet that didn't tell all the facts. A year later when they knew all the facts, instead of putting a halt to this investment, they poured more money in; they risked more.

Why, Mr. Speaker? Well they did it to avoid their own union tendering policy. They did it to fool our trading partners, Mr. Speaker. And they did it for the optics, it says in these reports, to fool Saskatchewan people. That's what the evidence proved this week, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier had a chance, has had many chances, to show some leadership, Mr. Speaker, to stand in his place and say we're going to be accountable and this minister or that minister — because there's a number of them, frankly — are going to lose their jobs over this matter, Mr. Speaker. But he has never taken that opportunity. He hasn't, Mr. Speaker.

So we're going to ask the Premier again today: will he quit hiding behind the courts, Mr. Speaker? Will he assume the responsibility of leadership and stand in his place and tell the people of Saskatchewan who on that side of the Assembly will take responsibility for this deception of Saskatchewan taxpayers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I couldn't agree more with the member from Swift Current about what this debate in this House this week has all been about.

This debate, Mr. Speaker, this week, has been about identifying who it is who's investing in Saskatchewan and building Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and who in fact is abandoning

Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That's what this debate's about because by the Saskatchewan policy resolution of their own, Mr. Speaker, they say that they will not be investing in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — in spades is what they say.

And today the member from Swift Current and the Leader of the Opposition have been on their feet all week saying that an investment in the potato industry today is a blunder, Mr. Speaker. And we were making that investment for Saskatchewan people. And I say, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the same position they take on the hog industry. That's exactly the same position they take on the ethanol industry.

And you have a group of men and women who sit over there, Mr. Speaker, who have hog barns in their backyards, who have ethanol plants in their backyards and they, Mr. Speaker, are saying that this policy of investing in rural Saskatchewan doesn't work. That's what they're saying, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier. To the Premier: yesterday the Provincial Auditor released his fall report. One of the auditor's biggest concerns is the misuse of gaming revenues by the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority. Virtually all of the revenue generated by casinos in Saskatchewan comes from the operation of slot machines and the Provincial Auditor says that every dollar of revenue generated from slot machines is taxpayers' money.

Yesterday the Provincial Auditor had this advice for his taxpayers about the money SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) is spending. And I quote:

(Well) . . . it's your money (that) they're spending . . .

And if SIGA is not spending it properly there's less money that comes to the provincial treasury to use for important programs like health and education.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier agree with the Provincial Auditor? Does the NDP government agree that all of the revenue generated from slot machine operations in Saskatchewan is taxpayers' money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to respond once again to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker.

I want to first of all point out — I think it's important to point out — that since the Provincial Auditor first reported on the SIGA situation two years ago, the organization has reduced its expenses by \$9.3 million and increased its net income by \$11.4 million.

SIGA, Mr. Speaker, is a young organization but it has made significant progress in improving its policies and processes. SIGA has recently developed a plan to address the Provincial Auditor's recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to — in advance of some other anticipated questions, if the members would care to listen — I want to talk to them about Dr. Harold Wynn, who is a noted Canadian gaming researcher based in Alberta, actively involved in treatment of problem gambling as well as broader gaming issues.

This is what Dr. Wynn says — please — Dr. Wynn refers to the new agreement SIGA has, FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), with the provincial government as the leading edge and the most progressive Aboriginal gaming agreement in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I again ask the Premier of Saskatchewan to stand in this House and answer this simple question. Does the NDP agree with the Provincial Auditor that all of the revenue generated from slot machine operations in Saskatchewan, is it taxpayers' money? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, it's very evident that there's serious disagreement between the member from Weyburn and the Leader of the Official Opposition. I'm going to quote one more quote from what he said last February to the chiefs of First Nations of this great province. This is what he said:

Gaming will certainly play an important role in successful future First Nations economic development.

And, Mr. Speaker, let me now go back to what Dr. Wynn said. He said the new agreement is a leading edge and the most progressive Aboriginal gaming agreement in Canada if not in the continent, Mr. Speaker, particularly in terms of the revenue-sharing approach and the dedication of funds for problem gambling programs.

He noted that the agreement deals with issues such as First Nations jurisdiction for on-reserve gaming and for on-reserve gaming regulation in a straightforward manner that demonstrates a willingness of the province and First Nations to work together to resolve these issues.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — ... refuses to answer the question. And Saskatchewan taxpayers have a right to expect their government to ensure all public monies are spent according to the law.

Taxpayers certainly expect their government not to approve or endorse any illegal expenditure of public money. And where their government delegates responsibility for the management of taxpayers' money, as in the case with SIGA, taxpayers also expect the government to ensure the management of those funds is done according to the law. But the Provincial Auditor says that SIGA is spending taxpayers' money without legal authority, and the auditor says that the NDP government knew about this illegal spending and actually approved of the spending.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to put a stop to any

further gaming expansion by SIGA until the Provincial Auditor is satisfied that SIGA is managing public funds according to the law and that SIGA is operating with sound business practices?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, we have been responding to the Provincial Auditor's reports. We have been ... I welcome the Provincial Auditor as the auditor of record, from the fall of 2000. We have been working with him, and have made a commitment with the new people that are in place at SIGA, the board of directors, and SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority). We are working towards a strategic plan which is currently underway and will be prepared in the near future to deal with a lot of these issues, Mr. Speaker.

I don't understand why the members opposite refuse to support an industry in this great province of ours, with a partnership between First Nations and this government that last year employed 1,107 people, and the salary worked out to about \$25,000 per person. Sixty-eight per cent of those employees, Mr. Speaker, were First Nations people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, last spring this minister stood in the legislature and justified signing a 25-year gaming agreement with SIGA and part of that agreement gave SIGA the exclusive right over expansion of casino in Saskatoon. Mr. Speaker, at the same time, at the same time as this agreement was being signed ...

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order please, members. Order. I would ask members to allow the question to be put.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, at the same time as this agreement was being signed, this minister was also approving illegal payments by SIGA to the FSIN and its licensing authority. This according to the Provincial Auditor. And all the while the minister knew that many of the recommendations that had been made by the Provincial Auditor had not been met. And this in the wake of the multi-million dollar scandal at SIGA, and they were being ignored.

How can the minister justify to the people of Saskatchewan his actions, actions that did not properly protect public funds, and that allowed some of these funds to be spent illegally?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't recall anywhere in the Provincial Auditor's report that there is a term, illegal. I don't recall that being said. And I hope the member ...

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

(11:00)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to talk about illegalities. There was no mention of illegal, any of the illegalities. Before I answer, before I acknowledge that, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to stand in this House and repeat what he told the chiefs of the

First Nations of this province. Or has he rescinded his feelings about that?

Mr. Speaker, the auditor suggested that SLGA approved improper use of public money by allowing SIGA to pay \$400,000 to the FSIN. The auditor says he thinks the payments were inappropriate. We think they were reasonable and appropriate under our First Nations gaming agreement.

When we had the framework agreement negotiations, Mr. Speaker, we felt it was extremely important to ensure that the negotiations were fair. And we wanted to make sure the FSIN had the resources to participate fairly in arriving at a good agreement that I believe will serve the people of this province well for the next 25 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — To request leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the House, sitting in the west gallery, a visitor this morning, Mr. Jeff Kallichuk who is the president of the United Steelworkers of America Local 5890 that represents the workers at IPSCO steel.

I would like to welcome Jeff to the House and thank him for coming in to witness the events of this morning and the proceedings. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Auto Theft Strategy Evaluation

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a stated objective of the new Department of Corrections and Public Safety to work towards keeping Saskatchewan people and Saskatchewan communities safe. Today I am pleased to table in this Assembly an evaluation of the Regina auto theft strategy.

This evaluation was done by Dr. Pfeifer, Dr. Jeff Pfeifer at the University of Regina, who is an internationally recognized expert in criminology, and Kim Skakun of the Canadian Institute for Peace, Justice and Security at the University of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, this evaluation shows that the government strategy to deal with young car thieves in Regina is working. Since the implementation of the auto theft strategy in February 2002, there has been a 43 per cent reduction in the auto thefts compared to last year. Mr. Speaker, this is the lowest level since 1995.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, in real terms that means that to the end of November there have been 1,450 fewer car thefts in Regina this year. I want to state that while there is no acceptable level of car thefts, the statistics show that the report indicates the strategy is working. The strategy was developed and implemented through a community partnership involving the provincial departments of Justice, Social Services, Corrections, Public Safety, together with the Regina Police Service and the Regina Intersectoral Committee.

The auto theft strategy consolidates resources and uses strict controls on high-risk repeat offenders. This includes 24-hour supervision and close monitoring of young offenders who are not in custody.

I want to report to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that since mid-October there has been an increase in the number of judicial interim release reports ordered by youth court judges. This has been instrumental in allowing the Corrections and Public Safety youth workers, the Crown prosecutors, and the police to ensure that an appropriate risk management strategy is in place to supervise and support those youth who pose a continued risk to reoffend. The integrated task group remains confident the strategy will be effective in addressing the cycle of offending behaviour and continues to emphasize the positive effect in the reduction on auto thefts.

Mr. Speaker, this is an effective strategy because it is a targeted approach. It builds on a number of earlier programs and a commitment of resources over time. That includes programs like the serious habitual offenders comprehensive action plan, or SHOCAP (serious and habitual youth offender comprehensive action program).

Community partnerships are at the heart of this strategy. Youth workers and police are working together to address the cycle of offending behaviour and to reduce the number of auto thefts.

The diversion program aptly named, HEAT — help end auto theft — is now under way. To be referred to the HEAT program offenders must admit their guilt. Youth who steal cars are held responsible for what they have done and we have Crown prosecutors working with the police, Social Services, Corrections, community organizations, and families to help turn these young offenders' lives around.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that the youth workers and police continue to conduct frequent night checks on chronic repeat offenders and other auto theft . . . other people involved in auto thefts.

The auto theft strategy is based on three principles. Firstly, it's based on the principle of responsibility. Young offenders will be held responsible for their behaviour and action.

Second of all, we believe in rehabilitation. Young offenders will confront and address the factors underlying their involvement in crime.

And third, we believe in reintegration. Young offenders will need to learn the skills necessary to participate in community

life without resorting to further offensive behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, in his evaluation, Dr. Pfeifer states, and I'm quoting:

It is clear that the Regina Auto Theft Strategy has been effective in implementing a number of innovative approaches and techniques to address the issue of young offender auto theft.

This is positive news for our city. It is positive news for our province. And I want to thank, very directly and personally, the departmental officials, the prosecutors, and the city police for the work that they have done in supporting and developing this strategy.

An important part of our commitment to keeping communities safe, Mr. Speaker, is protection of people and property, and the early results of the Regina auto theft strategy are proof that that commitment is working. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister in applauding the reduction in car thefts in Regina and the Regina auto theft strategy. I think it's a very good step that we're seeing auto thefts down in this city.

It's a little bit ironic though, Mr. Speaker, that it's the lowest since 1995. That tells myself and people of Saskatchewan that we've gone some seven years with an increasing auto theft rate until we actually had this government do something about it.

And I believe this government waited until they were first. They like to be first at something. So when we hit that magical figure of being first at auto theft, then the government decided to do something about it.

Now if that strategy would work with the exit of people, maybe we could get on that or maybe we're not quite first yet with the exit of people from this province before this government will get serious about it.

Mr. Speaker, also I'd like to comment on the fact that this is a Regina auto theft strategy. It's very nice to see crime reduced, but it'd be nice to see crime reduced province wide.

Now if this government would have complied with their election promise of providing 200 more police officers throughout the province, maybe we would see crime reduced in other areas of the province also. This member's statement deals specifically with auto theft in Regina.

So, Mr. Speaker, although we applaud very much the reduction in auto thefts in Regina, we think this government can go a lot farther in helping crime reduction throughout the whole province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bill No. 215 — The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2002

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to move first reading of Bill 215, The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2002, be now introduced and read a first time.

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

Bill No. 83 — The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 83, The IPSCO Inc. and the United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002 be now introduced and read for the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 83 – The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill that has just been given first reading. I'm confident that all hon. members will be able to give support to the Bill. This morning I'd like to take just a little of the Assembly's time to briefly outline the background of this legislation and to detail what it does.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to provide for a collective agreement that is longer than three years in duration. Members will know that section 33 of The Trade Union Act effectively limits the length of collective agreements to three years. An employer and a union may agree to a longer contract, but either side may give notice to begin bargaining a new agreement at the end of the three-year period.

It is important to note that section 33 of The Trade Union Act fulfils a useful and legitimate purpose. The provision is in effect because, generally speaking, a shorter term agreement protects the interests of both employers and workers in ensuring that wages and benefits reflect current economic circumstance.

Longer term agreements, on the other hand, are subjected to the volatility of the markets, and there is concern that they lock both parties into terms that do not reflect the changes in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the provision in The Trade Union Act does what all good legislation does. It balances the needs of the parties and provides real and important protection to both.

There are occasions, however, when one size doesn't fit all, and this is one of those occasions. IPSCO and the United Steelworkers of America agree that a four-year term is the best choice for their specific situation. They have jointly approached

the government and asked us to honour in their decision. Mr. Speaker, their agreement with this move is in evidence by their attendance in the gallery — Mr. Jeff Kallichuk from the United Steelworkers and Mr. Mike Carr, VP (vice-president) of human resources from IPSCO Inc.

For IPSCO this agreement means a longer period of labour relations stability, a period during which they can focus on delivering their high-quality products to their many customers.

For the workers, this contract makes them the highest paid in the country's steel industry. They have also achieved improvements in their vision, medical, and drug benefits, as well as in their pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, we are delighted to accept the joint recommendation of IPSCO and the United Steelworkers, and I invite all members to support this Bill. It's good for the employer, it's good for workers, and it is therefore good for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the minister's comments about Bill No. 83 concerning the collective bargaining agreement between IPSCO and the United Steelworkers of America.

It's very interesting to see that the government has really ignored the collective bargaining process in Saskatchewan in this matter, and this relates to other agreements in the province.

Mr. Speaker, as we have seen, a union and a very important industry and business in the province has worked through the collective bargaining process and came to an agreement. And they have agreed on a four-year contract which they have felt was in the best interests of the both the workers and their families, and IPSCO.

(11:15)

But they, of course, don't have the last say in the collective bargaining agreement as we find out today. We find out today that the government has the last word in collective bargaining agreements in this province. And it seems that the NDP government is really interfering with the collective bargaining process, and I think other unions and other businesses in the province will take this as a warning and should. And I'm sure they have talked to the government about the interference of the government in the collective bargaining process.

As we see, Mr. Speaker, the long arm of the provincial NDP government is looking into and has their hands on all sorts of areas in the province. As we see, the government likes to run the businesses in this province to the detriment of the taxpayer of this province. Now they feel that they have to micromanage everything in the province including the business industry of this province and of the labour negotiations. And as we've seen that the government barely can manage their own affairs without micromanaging collective bargaining units.

The people of Saskatchewan have no faith in this government as we have seen in Sask Water; the loss of \$28 million in potato industry; we have seen Liquor and Gaming, the debacle that has been caused there. And now, now the government feels that they should interfere with this collective bargaining agreement.

When we talk about IPSCO, not only this agreement but look what has the government done concerning the Kyoto agreement. IPSCO is on record as saying that this Kyoto accord could force them out of Saskatchewan, losing the 700 jobs that are in Saskatchewan. And now we see through extreme government regulation the NDP are putting more restrictions on the businesses of this province.

Mr. Speaker, it must've come as quite a surprise to the union negotiators and IPSCO management when they sat down and worked out a fair agreement among themselves, working through the collective bargaining process, to find out that they don't have the last say in this matter.

What we see, Mr. Speaker, is a government that has lost really the direction, lost its way. And it really is highlighted with this legislation and in labour legislation as a whole. They have put on layers of regulation and legislation and to really control every aspect of the business environment in this province. It could control every aspect of the bargaining units in this province.

And as we have seen, these actions by this government has only had a negative effect on Saskatchewan and on the taxpayers of this province. We see people leaving this province in droves to go to other jurisdictions where the labour laws are more friendly and where there's a growing economy. And this is another example of the government really putting restrictions on this economy for the NDP's own self-interest and not to the self-interest of the taxpayers of this province as a whole.

What we need in this province is more flexible labour legislation. What we need for this government is to get out of the way of the collective bargaining process, Mr. Speaker. Why would this government have restrictions on a collective bargaining process when the bargaining unit, the union and employers, sit down, negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, and that should be the end of it?

But no, we have this government in this area and so many other areas of labour legislation that they have their hands in, muddying up the water in so many areas in this province.

And the Saskatchewan Party believes in more flexible labour laws. And we believe that by mutual agreement the unions and the employers of this province should come to agreements that allow flexibility within the workplace, that . . . And we have seen in small businesses in this province have very flexible arrangements with their workers and to take time off with their family when needed or emergency arises or medical care is needed. And employers in this province are more than happy to accommodate these changes without having to go to the provincial NDP government to get permission to do . . . to make these changes.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we need to take a look at this bill and not only restrict it to one collective bargaining agreement.

What we need to do is do this province wide, get the provincial NDP government out of the way of the collective bargaining process, and let unions and the employers work out their own agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 83 — The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002

Clause 1

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

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my left is my deputy minister, Christine Tanner, and sitting directly behind Christine is Jim McLellan, the manager of legal policy in legislative services.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I welcome the deputy minister. This is our first opportunity that we've had to ask her questions in this Committee of the Whole. I'd like to ask a question concerning why has the government restricted this Bill just to this particular collective bargaining agreement, and why has the government not expanded this to the province as a whole under all agreements?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Chair, I guess to clarify a few issues that the member may have. First off, in his remarks he said that the negotiators for the union and the company would have been surprised during negotiations that there is a three-year limitation on the term of a collective agreement. I would sincerely doubt that, since this is the second time that this piece of legislation will be coming forward. We accommodated the IPSCO and United Steelworkers of America in a previous agreement that was a five-year term.

And maybe to clear up another misconception, to have a three-year limitation in the agreement in no way limits any company or a union from negotiating an agreement that is longer than the three-year term. They are quite able to do that. The only difference being is that they will still have the open period at the end of the three years, so either party could open the negotiations again to look at any agreement that is currently in place. That open period would exist.

What this piece of legislation does, and being it was requested by the steelworkers and by IPSCO, is give the security of a four-year continuous agreement.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to just clarify that. I think the surprise in the eyes of the union and the business, IPSCO, would be that this Bill, this Act

hasn't been repealed, and allow them to come to their own agreement.

They had to come to the legislature I understand in 1995 as well. And I would think at that time that the government of the day should have changed this Act so that businesses and unions don't have to come to the legislature and get permission to finalize a collective bargain agreement.

And again I'd like to ask the minister: has the government contemplated, and I believe the government should repeal this Act and allow the bargaining units . . . this clause, repeal this clause, and allow the bargaining unit and the industry to come to their own agreements?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Chair, I guess I would stress again that being the three-year term is in section 33 of The Trade Union Act, it in no way restricts the parties from negotiating a longer agreement. It is done fairly frequently throughout the province.

What IPSCO and the United Steelworkers of America are looking for is just that little extra security that the four-year agreement is a continuous agreement and doesn't have that open period at the third year.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, again I'd like to ask the minister, formerly the clause stated two years and it's been increased to four years . . . or to three years and you've increased it by 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I still don't understand why the government would feel that it has to have control over the collective bargaining agreement and not repeal this clause and not let the unions and the industries work out their own collective bargaining agreements without having to come hat in hand, basically, to the legislature every time to get permission to act on an agreement that they have negotiated.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The three-year term really is put in place to protect really the economic interests of both parties against volatility in the markets and drastic changes that may take place. And I would stress again that there is nothing that prohibits two parties from negotiating and agreeing to a contract and a process that is longer than the three years stated in The Trade Union Act.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again to the minister, it seems that the government and this minister doesn't have any confidence in the union movement of this province and of the employers of this province. What would be wrong . . . The union movement and the industry of this province are mature enough to make their own agreements. And what you're saying is you don't trust them to negotiate, through a collective bargaining process, their own agreements. So you want to look over their shoulder and have final say about any agreement.

Why would it be wrong to have a collective bargaining agreement that runs five years?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Now, Mr. Chair, I guess I would stress again that the Act does not specifically prohibit the parties from agreeing to longer contracts. It enables either party, at the end

of the three-year period, to give notice to enter into collective bargaining negotiations and reopen. So there is no restrictions whatsoever.

(11:30)

If anyone wishes to agree to . . . If both parties involved wish to agree to a longer contract, they can. And there is a number throughout the province that have done that.

Mr. Weekes: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess the question has to be asked again. If those clauses are in place, why, why do they have to come to the government, hat in hand, to get the okay of the legislature to finalize their collective bargaining agreement?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Chair, I would say to the member opposite that the only reason the steelworkers or IPSCO would come to the government hat in hand was because it would be inappropriate to wear your hat in the House.

But they are not doing that. What this does, it requests a more permanent so you do not, after the three years, have the open period. This will be a continuous four-year agreement.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

The Chair: — Why is the member on his feet . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The Minister of Highways has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, members. I'd like to introduce to you Roger Juarez, who is in the west gallery. Roger is senior vice-president with IPSCO Saskatchewan Inc. This is Roger's first visit to the legislature and he's really quite pleased to see how smoothly things run here.

And so we're happy to welcome you . . . we're happy to welcome Roger here to the legislature, and I soon will be happy to welcome him as a constituent as he's got property out in Deer Valley and will be a resident out there, probably sometime within this next year. So I'd ask you to join me in welcoming him to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 83 — The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move that Bill 83, The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of

America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

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

Mr. Hillson: — Before orders of the day, I ask leave to bring a motion under rule 46.

The Deputy Speaker: — What is the subject matter, hon. member?

Mr. Hillson: — The proposed by-election in the constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife.

Leave granted.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Request for General Election

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you to hon. members of this House.

Of course we all share in the sadness for the reason for the vacancy in the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency. And we all share in our conviction of the importance that the people of that constituency are represented in our deliberations at the earliest possible moment.

However we note that that constituency has now been abolished by the work of the redistribution commission which of course we . . . whose report we adopted on Monday.

We also note that we are into the . . . we're moving into the fourth year of the election cycle, and that we have had a Premier in office now for nearly two years without a mandate from the people of Saskatchewan.

And I think it only makes sense that rather than go to the expense of electing a member in a by-election for a seat that no longer exists, that in fact the people of Saskatchewan should be consulted and there should be a general election rather than a by-election in the constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife.

Now I note that the Premier, the Premier this week said that he wants a member from Battleford-Cut Knife very soon because he is confident the NDP will win that by-election and he's looking forward to another member on the government side of the House from Battleford-Cut Knife.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to burst the Premier's bubble but if I was laying money, I'd give better odds to the Taliban than the NDP there. In fact, Mr. Speaker — in fact, Mr. Speaker — the chances of the NDP winning the Battleford-Cut Knife by-election are a little bit less than the Minister of Culture being named Saskatoon citizen of the year.

But if the Premier still thinks I'm wrong, if the Premier still thinks, if the Premier still thinks that he can outpoll the Taliban in Battleford, then call a general election so we can have all

these new NDP members he has confidently predicted.

Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons, there are many reasons why the people of this province should be consulted. We have heard about the \$28 million SPUDCO fiasco. We have heard that the government sold this to the people initially as a public-private partnership when in fact there was no partnership at all. The people need to be consulted as to whether they approve of a government that says there is private involvement when in point of fact the private involvement was 52 bucks.

We need to consult them on the Broe deal. We need to consult them on the ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan), Information Services, the automation of our land titles system.

Mr. Speaker, we know that we could have acquired the automated land titles system from the province of Alberta for little or nothing. Instead, we were going to spend 20 million — now up close to 100 million.

And they told us they were going to market this around the world. They tried to market it in such exotic destinations as Fort Lauderdale and Australia. And of course they tried to market it in Albania, but unfortunately it was difficult to sell it to Albania because unfortunately that country's telephone lines had apparently been turned into fencing.

So, Mr. Speaker, the fact that our land titles system . . . Vast cost overruns; not working; that enormous global travel for non-existent sales — the people of Saskatchewan have to be consulted about that.

The people of the Battlefords, the people of the Battlefords want, want their opportunity to thank this government for cryptosporidium, and I think I know how they will express their gratitude to this government for its handling of water in this province — now water crises spreading across Saskatchewan. Maple Creek's on a boil-water order.

Well it would be a waste of money, Mr. Speaker, to call a by-election in Battleford-Cut Knife; we need a general election.

I also think, on a personal level, it would be tragic, it would be tragic, Mr. Speaker, for the person elected in that by-election because, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, whoever is elected as the new member for Battleford will only be able to sit for a little while, then we'll have a general election under the new boundaries.

And of course, as we all know, after the general election under the new boundaries, the MLA for Battleford will be myself. So I don't think we should set someone up for disappointment by electing him to Battleford today when we all know that they won't have that job for very long.

Mr. Speaker, this government has not been in office for 11 years. This government has been in office for two years. This government does not have a mandate from the people of Saskatchewan. This Premier has no mandate; he wasn't even a candidate in the last election. He should want to receive a mandate from the people of Saskatchewan.

And in the two years that this new government has been in operation, they have reversed the fiscal management of the Romanow government and they have replaced it with deficit financing that they have tried to hide through elaborate shell games.

I think most of us would agree that the prime achievement of the Romanow administration was getting the province's finances back into the black. Tragically that has been squandered by a Minister of Finance who thinks — in the words of the Provincial Auditor — that transferring funds from one account to another changes the province's financial outlook. And as the Provincial Auditor reminded us, it does nothing of the sort.

So I think the people of Saskatchewan need the opportunity to tell us whether they are happy about the Minister of Finance taking us back into deficit financing.

Mr. Speaker, there are many issues that I think require the input of the people. We should not elect a by-election member who will lose his or her seat in a few months. I would remind hon. members that in the last House, in the twenty-third House . . . in the twenty-third legislature we elected three MLAs by by-election who never took their seats in this Assembly. And I think we should try and avoid that sort of waste again, to elect three people who never even so much as take their seats. So we don't want that.

But we also don't want Battleford-Cut Knife to be left vacant. The solution clearly is for the government to seek the mandate from the entire people — not just the constituency but the entire people.

This constituency borders on the Kindersley constituency where we just had a by-election, and I welcome our newest MLA. And of course in that by-election the NDP ran third and got 16 per cent. And all I can say is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's all.

(11:45)

And I would say to the Premier if he expects much better results in the neighbouring constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife, then maybe that amendment to the Criminal Code they were talking about in Ottawa is already in effect. Because he is sadly mistaken if he expects results that are going to be a whole lot different in the seat just to the north of Kindersley.

So we have Crown corporations run amok. We have globe-trotting officials spending money but making no contracts. We have a Minister of Finance who transfers money from one fund to the next and says he's balanced the budget. We have the government saying they have a partnership with private investors and when we find out that this partnership consists of 28 million of taxpayers' money and 52 bucks of private investment . . .

An Hon. Member: — Fifty-one.

Mr. Hillson: — Fifty one. I overstated. My apologies.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time to ask the people of Saskatchewan

whether they want to move forward, whether they want to develop this province, whether they want to move onward and upward, or whether they want more cryptosporidium. And for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member from Swift Current:

That this Assembly urge the Premier to call a general election in Saskatchewan within six months of the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency becoming vacant in order to avoid a costly by-election.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to be able to second this motion and enter the debate, Mr. Speaker, that the heart of the motion of course calls for a general election to happen.

I mean, we have a . . . There's the prospect of a by-election upcoming in the Battleford-Cut Knife and I think the previous speaker, the member for North Battleford, quite rightly pointed out the reasons why we ought to have a general election and ensure the representation in the Battleford-Cut Knife, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But also because, of course, the results of a general election would be a change in the government and that would be even more important, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a list of reasons and the previous speaker went over them as to the need for a general election in this province. There are a whole host of reasons, not the least of which is the budget, which clearly is in a significant deficit position. The budget, the fiscal health of the province, is an issue, as it was — as it was — during the election of 1991. And quite rightly it was an issue then and it's an issue today. It's the same problem, Mr. Speaker; we're in a deficit situation.

There are many other issues. Health care is an issue. In my area, I think the people of Swift Current, for example, would be looking forward to a general election in the hopes that a general election might answer a question that this government has been unable to answer as regards their regional hospital. I think they're . . . be ready for one in terms of health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think the whole issue of Crowns begs for a general election. And how the Crown sector of this government is completely out of control. And how this government refuses to rein them in. How the government of this province is prepared to risk \$80 million in Australia, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they're cutting the agriculture budget, and while, Mr. Speaker, the health care needs of the province go unaddressed. I think that's a good reason for a general election, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think the fact that this government is prepared to invest \$22 million in a dot-com in Atlanta, Georgia, while they ignore the priorities at home, I think that's a reason for a general election, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think their willingness to risk \$30 million in Chile and Mexico, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they ignore the problems at home in agriculture and health care, I think that's a reason for a general election, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't think the case for a general election could be made any better, could be made any better, than it is made in this document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this document that we spoke of in the legislature this week. This document which was a review of the government's potato investment. A review of SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) by a reputed national firm of chartered accountants known as Ernst & Young.

This document provides every reason for a general election in this province, Mr. Speaker, because it answers the questions we had on Monday and Tuesday that the government wouldn't answer. Do you remember those questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Those questions were pretty simple.

Why in 1997 would the current Minister of Industry and the then minister of Sask Water walk into cabinet and recommend the risking of millions of dollars in the construction of potato storage sheds in Saskatchewan and not provide an accurate picture of the new company that was proposed to do the deal? Why would he do that?

The Deputy Premier seems to be interested in the debate. He didn't answer any of that . . . he didn't answer that question today. Maybe he would like to stand on his feet in this debate and answer the question. Why would he portray this deal other than as it should have been portrayed to his own cabinet colleagues? We ask that question.

And more to the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why, one year later when CIC officials of this government came to the cabinet and said, by the way, what you were told last year, it isn't true; there is no private sector partner; there's no private sector partner at all and the taxpayers are on the hook for 100 per cent — why then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would the government, would the cabinet ministers . . . And you can look across the way and see them all, those cabinet ministers that got that report. Why wouldn't they have said, this is not wrong; we are going to put a stop to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

There's the member for Regina Victoria. He sat at that cabinet table. There is the member for Meadow Lake. He sat at that cabinet table. And there's the Minister of Finance and the Deputy Premier. And, Mr. Speaker, they had an opportunity at that time to stand up in 1998 and say, what the minister of Industry told us in '97 wasn't true. We will not risk any more taxpayers' dollars in this. We're going to put a stop to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they didn't do that then. And that is a reason for a general election in 2003, as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question then that is begged by all of that is: why? Why in the world would they do that? Why in the world would they ignore advice from officials that said, you've been misled a year ago? Instead they put millions more, millions of dollars more at risk, and end up losing 28 million taxpayer dollars.

Well this document this week answered the question why. It answered it clearly, Mr. Speaker. You could find it and you could get . . . You know, not long ago, earlier on I think the member for Regina Dewdney said, he hollered across the floor and asked me if he could have a copy of this Ernst & Young report. Well the whole point of this week, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

is that it's this government's report. He ought to ask the Minister of Industry. He ought to ask the Deputy Premier or the Premier. Maybe they'd share the report with him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this report answers the question why in the world a government would do such a thing. Why wouldn't they come clean with Saskatchewan people? Why would they continue to risk money in a venture they knew had been not portrayed truthfully to them?

And here's the answer. Here's the answer. Southwest . . . I beg your pardon. Sask Water Corporation management has indicated that the current ownership structure provides a number of potential benefits, including avoidance of international trade investigation, use of non-unionized labour for construction, and the optics that there was a partner in the private sector when there wasn't.

And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I think I just heard the Deputy Premier say, well those guys are good at theatrics. I think that's what he just said from his seat.

This document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, clearly portrays once and for all that this government, this government, knew it wasn't telling the truth — knew it wasn't telling the truth but continued to risk millions of dollars. And that member right there sat at the cabinet table and did nothing. And that's why we need a general election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — What does this document say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to why they would do this? Why would they allow this ruse to continue? In the best of Nixonian fashions, why would they not let the truth come clean, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Because they wanted to trick our trading partners? They wanted to make this deal look what's known as NAFTA-green (North America Free Trade Agreement) so that it would follow all NAFTA rules when they knew that it wasn't because in order for it to be NAFTA-green, the government can't be a majority owner. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they wanted to fool our trading partners.

Do they understand what the implications could have been, not just for our potato industry but for the potato industry across Canada? If the Americans would have found out or any of our NAFTA partners would have found out about this — we know how willing the Americans are to sabre rattle and act over every little, tiny trade issue — imagine how they would have been all over this. It could have destroyed not only the industry in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the industry in Prince Edward Island. And they don't seem to care.

The Deputy Premier was grinning today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about all of this. He was grinning in his answers that never got to the point. So that's the first point. They wanted to deceive or trick their trading partners. That's what the report says.

The second thing they wanted to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and get this — the second thing they wanted to do was avoid their own union-only construction tendering policy. And get this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All these ministers that I've pointed

out, all these ministers that sit across the way, they read that. They read that. They read it in the report and what did they do about it? They did absolutely nothing.

Here's what they did. They committed more millions of dollars at risk of the taxpayers' money. That's what their answer was. Why would they do that? Well we can't let the truth get out.

Well I'm going to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this week the truth is out. The truth is out and the people understand this government for what it is. They understand this government for what it is and the member for Regina South and the Highways minister better pay attention because the people understand the government for what it is. And because they understand that, those members on that side of the House are headed for a huge election defeat at the polls, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — That's what's going to happen to them. I can't . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The Minister of Highways just hollered from his seat here, we don't have . . . that we don't have a clue. Well how about Ernst & Young, that was commissioned to do the report by his own government — by his own government? By his government. His government commissioned the report. Do they know what they were talking about? I would argue that they did.

And what was the final reason? The final of the three reasons why they would mislead the people of Saskatchewan in this way, why they would cover it up with millions of taxpayers' dollars, the final reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is for the optics — so they could trick the people of Saskatchewan into thinking that there was a private sector partner when there wasn't a private sector partner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a lot of reasons, there are a lot . . . Well, and the Deputy Premier's laughing, he's laughing. He's laughing about it. It's a big joke. It's a big joke to him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that his government didn't tell the truth, that his government tried to cover it up with other people's money. You know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Enron executives who did that sort of thing, they weren't just fired, but the only deals they're negotiating are with their prosecutors — that's the deals that Enron executives are negotiating.

But what about this outfit, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What happens to the minister that started all of this? Is he still negotiating deals? You bet. The Premier gives him a credit card for another 100 million taxpayers' dollars, Mr. Deputy . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I've been listening carefully to the fantasy ramblings of the hon. member for Swift Current. And I've been reading very clearly the resolution that is before the House at this moment.

I remind the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the resolution is calling for a general election within six months of the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency becoming vacant and in order to avoid holding a costly by-election so close to the next

general provincial election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would wonder — although it's amusing, I find the hon. member's musings amusing — that what the relevance is to the resolution that is before the House. And I would ask that you would ask the hon. member to direct his remarks in the context of the motion that is before us. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is all about the reasons why there needs to be a general election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — It's the government's Deputy House Leader that is fantasizing about his inability to recognize the truth in this document, Mr. Speaker. That's where the fantasy lies, is in that government side and their belief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they can avoid a general election as long as possible.

The people of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, want a general election. That's what this motion is about, is having a general election rather than wasting more money — after they've wasted \$28 million on SPUDCO, to not waste more money, Mr. Speaker, on a general election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(12:00)

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I thank the hon. member for raising the point of order, and the hon. member for speaking to it.

In reading the motion, I do believe that there is a great amount of latitude for spreading — pardon me — that there is a great deal of latitude available to the hon. members in speaking to this motion.

So I would rule that the point of order is not well taken, but I would ask the hon. member for Swift Current to ensure that he links his remarks back to the motion before the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd be happy to do that because that is precisely the point of my remarks to this point — the point of what I've been trying to portray and better yet, what Ernst & Young portray.

What Ernst & Young portray in this report on this government's investment in potato is that it speaks to a government, it speaks to a government that has lost its way. It speaks to the issue of a government that has lost its moral compass; that's more interested in covering up the truth and avoiding the political accountability that would go with that truth. It's more interested in that than it is in the interests of the taxpayers of the province, so much so that they would commit millions more to continue a cover-up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That's why we need a general election in the province of Saskatchewan, to get rid of a government that would have that

those kinds of priorities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I heard even in the point of order intervention, and I've heard from the seats over there, that, well this is fantasy; it's musings. Yes, well it's musings of chartered accountants who are commissioned by this government, by this government, commissioned by this government to look at the SPUDCO fiasco.

And they came, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the reasons why the government would cover this up. Why would they mislead the people of the province about these millions of dollars — why? There they are again. One final time, very quickly, here the three reasons are, Mr. Deputy Speaker: one, they did it to avoid their own union tendering policies; they did it to trick our trading partners, international trade organizations; and they did it to try to trick the people of the province.

And for that reason as well as the many others — but were there no others, for that reason alone — I would be seconding this motion, and asking all of the members of this Assembly to support its call for a general election so we can get rid of this NDP government in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, hopefully for the edification of the members and for the edification for the people who might be watching this, I would like to speak to the motion that's before us, and indicate at the outset that I would encourage members to oppose the motion, to defeat the motion that's before us.

The motion before us talks about a general election. The motion before us talks about a by-election. And it talks about a by-election that might be close to the next general provincial election. Well first let's get out the facts about general elections and by-elections, Mr. Speaker.

First, with respect to general elections, I would like to quote the law on this matter so that people are familiar with what the law is exactly. And it states in section 3 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council that:

Each Assembly shall continue for five years from the date of the return of the writs for the election and no longer, but the Lieutenant Governor may at any time dissolve the Assembly and cause a new one to be chosen.

So what the law says is that when election is done, the government will be able to serve for a period of five years. That's not normally the practice in Saskatchewan. I think most of those who are watching will know that most elections are usually, usually, held after a period of four years — give or take six months.

There has been at least one occasion in my term as an elected member that an election took . . . or that it took five years for a government to call an election. Of course that was in 1991 after five years of a Progressive Conservative administration that Mr.

Devine finally called . . . Well I don't think he had a choice any more. I think he was pretty much forced by this law to have an election. And I think there was one time back in the 1930s, again a Progressive Conservative administration, that carried on for a period of five years.

I might add in both those instances that those two governments were decisively defeated, and I think that reflects a sense by the voters that they don't have much stomach for governments lasting the full five years.

Again as I indicated, the practice is to go for about four years, or give or take six months or so. So we've seen elections that have gone for approximately four and a half years; we've seen elections go for approximately three and a half years. But the average is four years, and also the median or the most occurring sort of time between elections is four years in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to clear that up because members are indicating in their remarks or by way of this motion that an election might come soon. Well it might come soon, Mr. Speaker. Three and a half years would roughly be next spring; four years would be September 2003; and four and a half years would be, roughly speaking, the spring of 2004. But it's possible that there could be a general election as early as this spring, but it's not necessarily the case.

Well what they're saying is that we think there might be an election next spring so therefore you shouldn't have any by-election, Mr. Speaker. And I guess the implication of that being is, if there's no general election until the fall, then the people of this constituency, this part of Saskatchewan, would go unrepresented for almost a year, Mr. Speaker.

There's another law that I should like to familiarize people with, and that is the law pertaining to by-elections. And that law states that a by-election to fill a vacancy in the Assembly shall be held within six months, six months after a seat in the Assembly becomes vacant. And of course we know in the case of this constituency there is a vacancy because of the unfortunate passing of the former member, Rudi Peters, Mr. Speaker.

Now when was this law enacted? The previous law with respect to governments serving for five years has been around I think as long as this Legislative Assembly and as long as this province has been around, but this law with respect to by-elections has only been around for a few years. That law was enacted in 1991 and it was one of the first things that the then newly elected NDP government of Roy Romanow undertook to pass.

Why did we have this law and why did the Romanow government move with such speed to have that kind of law enacted, Mr. Speaker? Well that relates back to the conditions of the 1980s where contrary to the practice, the practice that prevailed in Saskatchewan, whether it was the previous government of Blakeney, the previous government of Tommy Douglas, Ross Thatcher — all previous governments — where more or less the premiers respected the fact that if there is a vacancy in a constituency and a by-election is necessary, that that by-election should be held within a reasonable period of time so that those people might then have an opportunity to be represented by a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And there was no law that stipulated what that length of time should be and . . . because most premiers I think acted honourably in that regard and respected the wishes of the people in that matter, Mr. Speaker.

But as I indicated, the 1980s, things went awry not only in this particular situation but went awry in many different ways for the people of Saskatchewan. But one of the ways in which the practices that had prevailed was not being respected was with respect to the calling of by-elections.

So we had situations where in the constituency of Kindersley, we had in 1989, in December of 1989, the then-serving member, Bob Andrew, resigned. And there was never a by-election and the seat was vacant for 22 months until there was a general election. So those people in Kindersley went unrepresented for a period of 22 months.

And the then premier, Grant Devine, refused to call a by-election. I guess he feared what might happen in the by-election, although again the prevailing practice had not been that premiers would put their political interests ahead of the interests of the people of the constituencies who demanded to be represented.

Similarly, Graham Taylor, he resigned in January 18, 1990 in the seat of Indian Head-Wolseley; that constituency was vacant for 21 months. Colin Maxwell, who represented the Turtleford constituency, he resigned in July 1, 1990; that seat was vacant for a period of 16 months. And Eric Berntson who resigned from the constituency of Souris-Cannington, that seat was vacant for a period of 15 months. No by-elections were ever called by the government. The government took the point of view if we don't have to do it, well we're not going to do it and we'll do whatever is in our own, narrow political interest to do.

And I think that was part of the reason that the people of Saskatchewan were so revulsed by what they saw in the Devine administration, which was just a sheer arbitrary exercise of power. No, if you like, heeding of what past practices had been; no heeding of what was in the best interest of the people in the province as a whole, Mr. Speaker.

And it was for that reason then that in 1991, that one of the early acts of the Romanow government was to put some limits, limits on future governments. And that was a law that we didn't have before, never really needed prior to Mr. Devine. But we put in place some limits as to the calling of a by-election. That limit that was chosen was six months. There was some debate about whether it should be six months or something else. But at the end of the day, the government said that there should be a six months limit. And that, Mr. Speaker, is why we have the law that we do.

Now the opposition is criticizing that, you know, it'd be too costly to have a by-election within the next few months and then some months after that have a by-election . . . or have a general election. It would be too costly to do that and they say for that reason, well you shouldn't have by-elections.

And that reminds me too of the criticism that we heard prior to

1999 general election when there were a couple of vacancies and there were by-elections held both in Saskatoon Fairview constituency, I believe, and certainly I know in Regina Dewdney constituency, when the opposition say oh well, it's a waste of money to have these by-elections and this is not a very good law, Mr. Speaker, but . . . Well, that's their criticism, Mr. Speaker.

Of course now they're making another criticism saying there's all these issues that are before the public and therefore you should call a general election, notwithstanding the fact that a government is theoretically and legally elected for a period of five years. They say because of those issues . . . And I don't think that those things are particularly relevant to the motion before us, but nevertheless, that's what they address, Mr. Speaker.

I don't want to get into a debate of all the issues that they've brought up, Mr. Speaker. I don't have time to get into all of those issues. But I would have a question about — which I find very puzzling — where they attack us on making the financial decisions that we did with respect to paying for the suppression of forest fires during the course of this year, paying as we did or taking . . . allocating monies as we did to cover the losses in the Crop Insurance Fund.

(12:15)

What alternative would they suggest to the people of Saskatchewan? Why is it that they're not in a position to advocate what the alternatives should be, Mr. Speaker? Because I frankly find it puzzling that when you have catastrophic, catastrophic occurrences such as the drought we had this year and the forest fires that attended that, that the government should not respond in the appropriate fashion that it has, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I also found it bizarre, laughable, when members of the opposition who were active in the previous Devine administration, use words such as cover-up as a means of criticism. I think these are people that very clearly need to look in the mirror and understand cover-up and what was going on in the course of the 1980s before they start attacking this government.

And I also find it kind of odd that they would access or have access to documents that portray criticisms of the government, they say, and then say well this is a cover-up. Well if it's a cover-up, how did they get the information, Mr. Speaker?

Well, Mr. Speaker, we are a country of laws. We are a country of due process. We do not believe in the arbitrary exercise of power or that the government can arbitrarily deny laws or make laws. And that's what separates us, Mr. Speaker, from dictatorships.

We don't believe that there should be a whimsical approach, if you like, to governing and the observance of legislation. We have not only legislation, but courts that uphold those laws. We also have oversight committees in the Legislative Assembly in addition to a process where members can question the government on the observance of laws, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of system that we have in this country.

And that is also the system that men and women fought for this country, Mr. Speaker, because we believe in the kind of society and we believe in the rule of law and due process, Mr. Speaker.

So now to hear again that the opposition would somehow arbitrarily want us to ignore the law, even though there is a law, I find troubling, Mr. Speaker. But I guess it's not unusual that it would come from those members opposite because that has been their approach to governing, or at least it was in the 1980s.

And I think the people of Saskatchewan will be concerned and might be part of the reason that people are concerned about this party even with its new name, that they seem to have this kind of arbitrary approach to laws that are there and arbitrary approach to due process.

And people sometimes wonder that if they were the government, would we be going back to the 1980s where governments ignored laws, or if there were no laws, they would ignore reasonable practice that . . . practices that were in effect? And I think that's one of the fears that people have about the Leader of the Opposition and the men and women that he leads in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

I also find it odd that here we have a situation that is caused by a set of circumstances, as I've indicated, which is a . . . the untimely passing of Rudi Peters. And therefore now we have this vacancy that exists, that they wait for this vacancy to exist to complain — that they wait for this vacancy to exist to complain. And I guess that's understandable because oppositions always, always complain after the fact. Oppositions are never, or never, or rarely ever try to anticipate what might happen and what should be done.

We have never seen for example, in the years that I've been here, from this opposition, since the law was changed to put into effect that there should be no longer than six months before the calling of a by-election, I've never seen any proposal by the opposition members to change that law to however they might want to make the law more effective so as to preclude a by-election taking place within a month of, say, some general election. I don't know how you would do that, but I've never seen any attempt by them to put before the Legislative Assembly an Act that we might consider and . . . as a means of improving the law that we have before us.

Certainly they have had lots of opportunity. People who watch this channel will know that on almost any given day, and again today, that members will put forward Bills that they think will improve legislation. We've seen some, if I might say, some pretty silly ones over the years, Mr. Speaker; but again the opportunity is there for them to do that. So again my question is: if this is such a concern, why haven't we seen proactive legislation from the opposition to deal with this particular issue, Mr. Speaker? They've had the opportunity.

I wonder too, Mr. Speaker, if this is not when the member for the Battlefords says, I'm going to be running in this new constituency and I don't want there to be a new member that might potentially oppose me in that constituency. I wonder what that says, Mr. Speaker?

Again in summing up, Mr. Speaker, nothing, nothing is perfect

as I have found — whether it's legislation or whatever it is. Nothing is perfect but we make choices.

We have on the one hand, Mr. Speaker, a law that says a by-election must be held within six months of there being a vacancy, Mr. Speaker. Now that might mean that a member might only be serving for a few months until there is a general election. And that's not the most perfect situation, admittedly, Mr. Speaker, but I would want the people also to consider what is the alternative. And the alternative would seem to be no law whatsoever and then again back to governments exercising arbitrarily, arbitrarily what should or should not happen when it comes to the interests of the people of Saskatchewan.

And again, there have been many governments that have treated those vacancies, that have treated the interests of the people with a great deal of respect over the years. But that is not something that we saw from the Devine Progressive Conservative administration during the 1980s where we saw such a rampant, rampant abuse of power the likes of which we have never seen in this province before, the likes of which we have never seen in Canada before, Mr. Speaker. And we I think are right to have a law that prevents us ever, ever going back to such an abuse of power, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I just want to say that even the people in the Battlefords who are most affected, through their newspaper, in their editorials, are saying there should be a by-election as soon as possible so that the people there can be represented. They too don't want to go back to the kind of situation that we had in the 1980s where we had this flagrant abuse of power, Mr. Speaker.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage members to oppose the motion, to defeat this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I won't be long in my remarks this afternoon but I do want to speak to this motion, and I know that members of the opposition will be very interested in what I have to say.

The motion calls for a general election within six months. Now I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are just over three years into the mandate of this government. And you will know as well, controversy when governments exceed a sort of historical four-year term. The opposition will cry wolf when a government calls an election prior to the four years of an historic and a normal mandate of government. They cry wolf. You can't, I say, Mr. Speaker, make members of the opposition happy.

And I think that's very much evidenced by the approach that has been taken by the Saskatchewan Party because they oppose everything that happens in this province whether it has positive economic possibilities and benefits or whether it's good public policy.

Mr. Speaker, they take the opportunity to attack government. And so I say in the context of this motion, which I won't be supporting, we on this side of the House are looking forward to

an election.

And we're looking forward to an election because I think people are taking the opportunity to define people, members on this side of the House, who are achieving economic development initiatives in a positive way. This economy is growing. And they're going to have an opportunity to compare people who are going to be running for the Saskatchewan Party in the next provincial election.

And I think there's some evidence building that people, as my colleague who spoke before me has indicated, are concerned in terms of what kind of a list of candidates might come to the fore, Mr. Speaker.

I want to speak a little bit about why I believe members on this side of the House are interested in seeing an election because I think it's going to be very much focused on our economic development record.

It's going to be focused on the strength of this province. It's going to be focused on a vision for the future. And it's going to be a comparison of what people on this side of the House want to see as it relates to economic development versus the sloganeers in the Saskatchewan Party who are totally void of a thought as it relates to developing the Saskatchewan economy.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's become very clear that members of the Saskatchewan Party are focused on criticism. That's what they're about. They're focused on negativism. That's what they're about.

They attacked the wide open future campaign, Mr. Speaker, to promote this province as a good place to live, a good place to do business. They don't like to hear that and they don't like to hear about the positive things that are happening in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, they can chirp from their seats. But I want to share with them the economic development plan that's put together by this province which is a plan and not a slogan.

And I want to ... why I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has little more than a slogan to offer the people of Saskatchewan, a few short weeks ago I noted their caucus releases. And it was one after another after another. And the plan at that time was the Saskatchewan Party has a plan to grow the population of Saskatchewan by 100,000 people in 10 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — And that was their plan, Mr. Speaker, and they're cheering. They're cheering. And that was their plan.

What were the details, Mr. Speaker? There were none. What were the details, Mr. Speaker? There still are none. But I also noticed a headline on that caucus ... on their caucus sheets changed about a week or two ago. And it says, not that the Saskatchewan Party has a plan — they don't have a plan any more — they've ... even they have recognized now that they've got a goal.

Now there's a difference, Mr. Speaker, between members on this side of the House, and members on that side of the House. They've now got a goal. It's a goal. They don't have a plan any more, and they've admitted it.

We've been asking for details of where they would head this province for months. And the answer to that is absolutely nothing. And members on the opposition are saying, we've been asking about your plan. Well, I'll tell them about the plan.

The plan is to continue to develop jobs and job opportunities for Saskatchewan people, and the records are showing through Statistics Canada that it's happened. Mr. Speaker, we've posted seven straight months of solid job growth. The last four months have been record-breaking job numbers in this province, which turns into a population increase, Mr. Speaker. In November, we had more people going out to work every morning in this province than we've ever had in the history of the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, they're yelling and they're hollering. They don't want to hear this. But they're going to have to bear with me because I think the people of Saskatchewan want to know where this government is taking them.

Mr. Speaker, we had 24,400 new jobs this November over last November — as I said, a record number. And that's been going on for four months . . . seven straight months of job growth in this province, Mr. Speaker.

We've got the third lowest unemployment rate in this country, Mr. Speaker. And how does this all happen? I want to tell them about the economic development plan of this government. We embark upon a program of meaningful tax reductions, Mr. Speaker — the largest personal income tax cut in the history of this province. We've introduced the most comprehensive mining package that this province has ever seen which makes us among the leaders in this country in terms of investment attraction. We put in place a prospectors and a developers incentive program, and it's been very well accepted by the mining industry, Mr. Speaker.

We have put in place competitive oil and gas royalties in this province, the most competitive in the history of this province. And Mr. Speaker, members on that side of the House say it's not enough.

But one of my colleagues today talks about land sales — over \$100 million, the biggest land sales in the last five years here in Saskatchewan. And I say, Mr. Speaker, that's progress. It's part of our economic development plan, and it's working.

(12:30)

Mr. Speaker, we mandated ethanol. We introduced legislation to mandate ethanol, and we're developing an ethanol industry in this province. And members on the other side have attacked not only the program, they've attacked the people who brought millions and hundreds of millions of dollars here to invest. So, Mr. Speaker, it's more than attacking a program. They also attack the people who are bringing investment dollars to this province.

We've been reducing corporate taxes. We've been reducing

small-business taxes along with personal income taxes over the last 10 years. And, Mr. Speaker, that too is part of our economic development plan. And part of the economic development plan too also includes the Wide Open Future campaign which is marketing this province, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's a record of straight years of economic growth in this province for the last 10 years that we can all be proud of, not only the government. Because we can direct policy and we can put in place an overall plan, but ultimately it's going to be the investment community, ultimately it's going to be the investment community that creates jobs. And we've created the environment by which that can happen, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's one of the things that the people of this province are going to recognize when we go to the polls, whenever the Premier decides to call that election, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to point out some other differences that are going to be before the people of the province. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has been hiding their affiliation with the former Progressive Conservative operation. They put that rascal to bed some years ago, Mr. Speaker, because they could not sustain the political impact of what that Progressive Conservative Party delivered to this province for 10 years, Mr. Speaker. And people know. They remember it well, and they know all about it.

And, Mr. Speaker, when you start to look at what's surfacing in this province as the Saskatchewan Party, not the Progressive Conservatives — oh, no — they call themselves now the Saskatchewan Party. One of the former Social Services ministers from Melville in the Grant Devine administration has decided he wants to come back. He doesn't want to talk about the past. He wants to talk about the future, and he's seeking the nomination for those folks.

And, Mr. Speaker, a nominating candidate in Regina South who was closely tied to the Grant Devine administration of the 1980s by the name of Jim Roberts is now the candidate in Regina South. And I want to say to you — oh, and there's cheers, Mr. Speaker — and there's some very close ties to the Progressive Conservative Party in the 1980s in the government of the past.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are people in this legislature who also have some very close ties to that former administration. And I only need to look at Economic Development and Tourism in 1990, Mr. Speaker. I see the minister . . . in the minister's office, under a Mr. Eric Berntson, telephone number — whatever it is, 787 something — and there's an associate minister, Mr. Speaker. And working for that associate minister is an executive director who's a member of this legislature, Mr. Speaker. And there couldn't be any closer ties to the former Progressive Conservative Party than the three I've raised right here.

And, Mr. Speaker, the people that are hovering around them, the people that are looking for the political largesse of the 1980s have resurfaced and are part of that operation again. And let the people of Saskatchewan make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker, you don't change the spots on a leopard. And the leopard of the 1980s is the leopard of 2002 here in this province. It's no longer

called the Saskatchewan . . . or the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan. They put that one to bed. They now call themselves the Saskatchewan Party. And Mr. Speaker, people will not forget that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when you try and promote this province, you try and promote this province . . . And the editorialists are saying we need to promote Saskatchewan as a good place to live and to do business and that we've made some advantages and we've created a circumstance here, in Saskatchewan, where people will invest. What does the members from the Saskatchewan Party say, Mr. Speaker? Straight partisan politics. It's got nothing to do with supporting this province and supporting this economy. Mr. Speaker, they attack that. And they attack the people in the chamber of commerce who want to see a forward-looking way of presenting this province to the rest of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote just from an editorial recently. You know, it's talking about . . . This is Regina *Leader-Post*, December 11 of this year and they're talking about the Wide Open Future campaign. And I want to say . . . They go on to say:

It's too early to say if the campaigns are having (any) impact on migration.

However, with new incentives for oil and gas companies and an expanding industry in ethanol, which they attack, the province and construction growth and robust retail sales, Mr. Speaker, all of the positive things that have been happening around members of the Saskatchewan Party who choose to ignore it and bury their heads in the sand, the old ostriches that they are, Mr. Speaker, editorialists of this province are saying that this is the right to do, Mr. Speaker.

. . . the province seems to have recently shaken off some of its perceived lethargy. Taxes are falling and November saw 24,400 more people (working) . . . than a year ago (Mr. Speaker).

If these trends can be maintained and the ailing farm economy rebound from two straight years of drought (which they choose to ignore by the way, Mr. Speaker) . . . this province has a big enough future to reverse its population loss(es). Amid the gloom is hope.

And, Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk where the gloom is focused, it's right over there. It's right over there. It's from one end to the other, Mr. Speaker.

And I tell you in 2001 when we had difficult job numbers, the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party came out every month saying woe is me, gloom and doom. We lost 20-some—thousand jobs in agriculture, Mr. Speaker, at the same time but we compensated by creating 25,000 on the other side.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, when the job numbers turned in 2002 and this economy moved, where was he? Where was he? Journalists would call the Saskatchewan Party caucus for a response — November, when we get 25,000 new jobs — and they'd say oh, we don't want to talk about that. We don't want to talk about a positive attitude. We don't want to talk about

building this economy.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, we have a problem and one of the members from down in the south country is chirping about the young people. Ninety per cent of the people who come out of our SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) campuses are employed right here in this province. And 75 per cent of the young people who come out of these universities are employed right here in this province.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, we want to call an election. You're going to see an election. It's going to be fought on attitude and it's going to be fought on an economic development game plan. So I ask members on that side of the House, if you want an election are you prepared to put forth details of an economic development plan? We want an election and we'll have an election. And I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is going to be returned to power.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — This government is going to be returned to power because the people of Saskatchewan have no troubles making the connection between Grant Schmidt, the former Social Services minister of Grant Devine, they have no troubles making that connection to the Saskatchewan Party.

And they have no troubles making the connection between Jim Roberts, their candidate for Regina South, and the largesse that he and his partners received under the Devine administration, untold dollars in terms of advertising money. They have no troubles making that connection. And, Mr. Speaker, those members opposite can try to hide who they are but the people of Saskatchewan are wiser than that, Mr. Speaker. They are much wiser than that.

They know that this economy is strong. They know that the future of this province is truly wide open. They know that there are job opportunities for Saskatchewan's young men and women right here at home. And they're going to support people to come to this legislature to create a positive environment where that can continue to happen because no one — no one — is going to buy the gloom and doom of the men and women on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to close by saying that I can't support this motion. I won't support the motion. I'll be voting against it.

But I'll tell you what I will support. I will support continued work by Saskatchewan's business community and the people who are coming to this province to invest millions of dollars — whether it's to create intensive livestock, whether it's to buy new . . . build new ranches in this province, or whether it's to create manufacturing and processing opportunities, Mr. Speaker, or whether it's the people who have brought a billion dollars to the forest industry in this province — Mr. Speaker, those are the people that I'm going to be supporting. Those are the people that the men and women on this side of the House are going to be supporting.

And, Mr. Speaker, I close by saying, I'm looking forward to the election because, Mr. Speaker, these people are going to walk into a 30-day campaign without a plan, without a vision for this

province — nothing but a slogan. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, I'll put our economic development game plan ahead of the slogan of the Saskatchewan Party any old day.

And I can't tell the Premier when to call it. But I'll tell you what — when he does call that election, we'll be out of the chute. We'll be putting forward our plan. We'll be fighting nothing but a slogan. And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, this government will be re-elected. Call the election, I'm ready.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to add one or two comments that I think are quite important when we're talking about a motion such as this. We're talking about calling an election in the next six months and for reasons that have been discussed already and I think that's very important.

The election is going to be called sooner or later and the election will be based certainly on platform. But it's going to be based primarily on two things: confidence in the government, and the confidence that the people have in the ability for them to govern in a manner that they've shown us over the last while. What we can't tolerate in this province is more confusion. We need more confidence. And the confidence is the thing that seems to be lacking here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let's talk about confusion to start with. If we're looking at this by-election coming up in Battleford-Cut Knife — which will have to be done within the next six months — that is a very confusing situation when new boundaries have already been put in Act in this legislative sitting.

That is going to affect a great deal of other constituencies around there, so the confusion will continue. It's been referred to earlier but the confusion will certainly continue when we have candidates from either side or any of the parties, they may or may not be within the boundaries of the by-election — which will very soon after that become new boundaries — so which constituency will they be representing at that time.

We're looking at about six different constituencies that are going to be affected — certainly the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency, on the old boundaries, which transforms into the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency. The confusion then becomes who's going to be representing and where they're from.

We have interested candidates that are in other constituencies on the new boundaries. It becomes a real puzzle for not only the people that are interested, it becomes a real puzzle for the people that want to know who their representative is going to be.

For instance, when we're looking at the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency, it comes fairly close to Lloydminster and bordering the Lloydminster . . . the old boundary of the Lloydminster constituency. But in fact when the new constituency comes into place, that is totally eliminated and if you live six miles out of Lloydminster, you're in Cut Knife-Turtleford — completely different than what the by-election is going to be called on.

So that element of confusion has to be considered and I think

we want to do away with that confusion. And we can do that simply by calling an election in that appropriate period of time.

Let me talk a little bit about the confidence that's needed when we come to an election. People will certainly decide for themselves on the record of this particular government. And when we see the things that have been done by this government — and we're talking about first of all, the financial position that this government has put this province into — you have to wonder is there any confidence left in our ability to be able to sustain the services that are expected of government.

Let's talk a little bit about the confidence that has been shaken when we found out that the Minister of Finance has been talking all along about the balanced budget in this province. The balanced budget in fact is on one portion of the budget and in fact it is balanced. When you look at the General Revenue Fund, you can keep it balanced by shifting money around. And when you shift the money in order to achieve that perception of balance, then confidence starts to be shaken.

(12:45)

And it's not from my word or anyone else's word other than the Provincial Auditor of this province has indicated that when you take the picture in total, the debt has increased and it's increased fairly substantively.

I can use an example from the Provincial Auditor's 2002 Fall Report, a very recent edition where, and I quote from this, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The government's accumulated deficit is a better indicator of the government's financial condition.

And when we look on that, when you look at the bonds, debentures, the unfunded pension liability and things called other, the debt has increased significantly and is in fact higher now than it was in 1997 and certainly higher than it was in 1991. And when we talk about balanced budgets, that is not giving the people of the province confidence that any of the projections that we're looking at in the future is in fact the true picture.

And we've debated this issue over the last couple of days in terms of whether we should be putting the accounting forward in balanced summary budget form or not. And certainly that is the recommendation of the auditor and the recommendation of this particular party, and that will in fact happen.

We talked about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and what an advantage it is. And if in fact it was a fund, it would have been a great asset for us in a time when we really needed that money. But the fund was in fact utilized in another fashion. And when you, quote, "draw down" from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, you are just in fact increasing your debt that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was addressing earlier.

So it's interesting. I guess if I was going to put it in context with the farming operation that I was involved with at one time, I would have to say that if I had an operating loan and I had a current account, to keep my current account in balance, I would have to utilize my operating loan, more or less, and try and get

it paid off so that I always had a current account that was on the balance or in the black.

The Minister of Finance often counters with the fact that for several years the bond rating agencies have looked at the Saskatchewan finance and said that everything is fine and the province is doing well.

It would be like me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be like me going to the bank and saying to the banker, lookit, Mr. Banker, I'm a really good guy and I want you to make sure that I still have continuing credit and my credit line is still in place. And he said, yes, yes you are. And he looks at my current account and says, yes, you've kept it in the black and you've kept it going in the right direction and so you are a good guy. And therefore that gives me the opportunity to utilize even a higher debt than before.

But the fact is that it is still a debt whether the banker gives me a higher rating or not. We are still operating at a debt and we're increasing the debt. And that in fact is a real particular problem.

Now we've talked earlier too about other things that really have shaken the confidence of people and we're talking in the last few days about the SPUDCO and the misinformation that was passed along and decisions were made and information, inaccurate information, was presented at various levels. That is not an acceptable way for a government to be operating and I think it's time that the people of Saskatchewan had an opportunity for them to decide whether that is an acceptable practice or not.

If we quote the Provincial Auditor again, we find out that there is an article saying that that is not in fact the way it should be and the confidence that again is shaken when we're talking about the things that have been brought forward in this House under SIGA and the controls that may or may not have been put in place.

And the one quote that the auditor has said:

If this came . . .

And I quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

If this came out of the private sector and they had to report it, I think there would be a lot of trouble.

And I would agree with that, because the people of Saskatchewan are going to find that very, very troublesome and are going to dictate to this government that their . . . the end of their term is very, very near.

Other things that we are running into problems with in terms of confidence is the ISC, the overbudgeting on ISC for whatever reason. In fact it is a gross overbudgeting. That is not going to create the confidence needed.

And the tendering of the EDS (Electronic Data Systems) agreement where there is no tendering. And it's interesting to me as well that the Canadian representative for EDS has made comments that they will certainly be pleased to invest significantly into Saskatchewan if, in fact they get the highest

IT (information technology) deal that they're asking for — unsolicited.

And to me that is a pressure tactic that I would hope no corporation or government would submit to. And if they do, I'm sure that the confidence level is not going to be moving in the, certainly, the right direction.

This really requires a general election to clear the air. We have to have the opportunity for the people to talk about and to vote on exactly the platform and the record. It's time to clear the record, put the record forward, and to clear that air.

What we have to do is to make sure that the Premier becomes mandated for being the Premier of the province and not carrying on any longer without the mandate of being an elected Premier.

So I would very much support this motion calling for an election within the next six months and not a by-election in that time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion negated on division.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:55.