



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

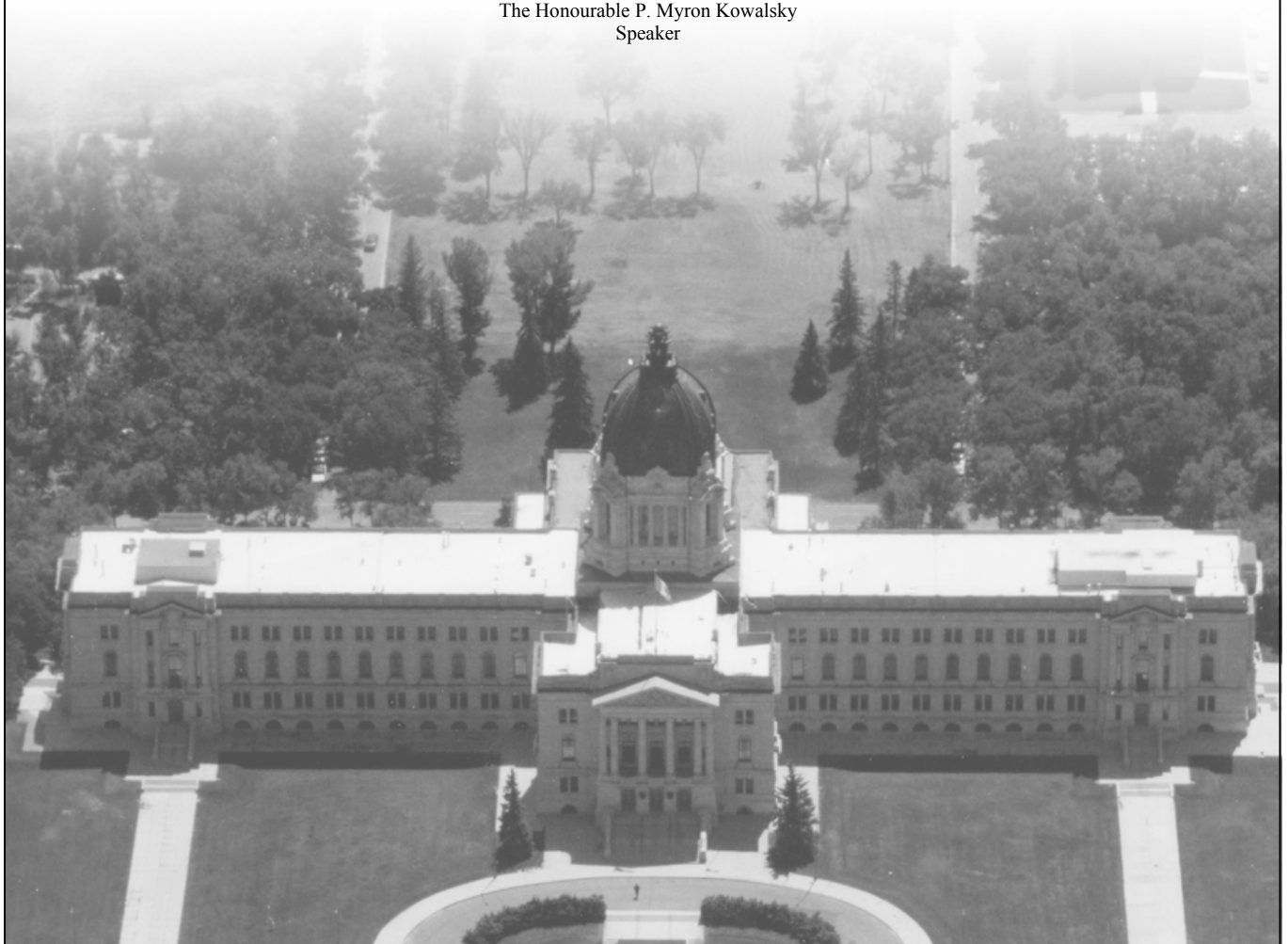
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky
 Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert
 Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Addley, Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Bakken, Brenda	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, Hon. Joanne	NDP	Regina Rosemont
D'Autremont, Dan	SP	Cannington
Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, Hon. David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Gantfoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Glenn	NDP	Moose Jaw North
Hamilton, Doreen	NDP	Regina Wascana Plains
Harpauer, Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Ben	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Higgins, Hon. Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kerpan, Allan	SP	Carrot River Valley
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Kowalsky, Hon. P. Myron	NDP	Prince Albert Carlton
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lautermilch, Eldon	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Ted	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Prebble, Hon. Peter	NDP	Saskatoon Greystone
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Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
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Thomson, Hon. Andrew	NDP	Regina South
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wakefield, Milton	SP	Lloydminster
Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise on behalf of constituents of the extreme part of the constituency of Cypress Hills, extreme southern part, not the extreme part, the extreme southern part of the constituency, and it's a petition concerning a highway surfacing issue. 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 actions to ensure that Highway 18 from Claydon to Robsart is repaved at the earliest possible time to ensure the safety of drivers in the area, and so that economic development opportunities are not lost.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by constituents from the communities of Frontier and Claydon.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by members of the Rosetown-Elrose constituency and this petition regards recent changes to the crop insurance program which result in large premium increases for insured farmers while overall coverage is reduced. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of this petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take all necessary actions to reverse the increase in crop insurance premiums and the reduction in coverage.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from the communities of Lucky Lake and Beechy, and I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood Mountain.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with a petition from citizens that are really concerned with the deplorable state of Highway 43. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 43 in order to address safety concerns and

to facilitate economic growth in rural Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by citizens from Medicine Hat, Wymark, Saskatoon, Vanguard, and Aneroid.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens from the town of Davidson that are outraged that the government is considering possible reductions in services to Davidson-Imperial health centres.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that Davidson-Imperial health centres be maintained at their current level of service at a minimum, 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctor services available, as well as lab, public health, home care, and long-term care service available to users in the Davidson-Imperial area and beyond.

As in duty bound, petitioners will ever pray.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to present a petition on behalf of people on behalf . . . in west central Saskatchewan concerned with seniors bridging to independent living. And 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 steps to ensure that citizens of Unity and district remain in the community for this necessary service that will bridge the gap between independent living and long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good folks from Unity; Edmonton, Alberta; Luseland, Denzil, and Regina, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received:

A petition concerning repavement of Highway 18 from Claydon to Robsart;

And addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper no. 63, 65, 69, 72, and 76.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — I give notice that I shall on day no. 22 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Information Services Corporation: how many lawyers are employed by ISC? Further to that, under the old land titles system, how many lawyers were employed?

And also on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 22 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Information Services Corporation: how many people are employed full and part-time at ISC as of April 1, 2004? How many were employed full and part-time at ISC as of December 31, 2003?

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this House, a friend of some 35 years, Dr. David Ansley, who is sitting in the west gallery. I ask David to make a wave to folks here.

David is associate professor of medicine at UBC (University of British Columbia) practicing anaesthesiology and also practicing social activism in Vancouver, trying to make sure that there's some good social justice in that province.

David and his wife, Gayle have two boys, live in Vancouver. He's a graduate of Thom Collegiate here in Regina where he was president of the students' union and also star quarterback.

David is a grad of the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) medical college and is visiting his mother, Vera, here in Regina and we are very happy to have him visiting the legislature today. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to not introduce to you and through you, but welcome the visitors in the gallery this afternoon: Bob Bymoan, president of SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) and also Bev Crossman, various members of the executive and bargaining committee for SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). Also there's many students that are present in the gallery. Some of us had an opportunity to go out and visit them at their rally out in front of the legislature this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, there are other places that we wish the students were than here this afternoon, but being they did take the time and make the effort to come down, I would like everyone to

please welcome them and the instructors and the members of SGEU. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Sliver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with the Minister of Labour in welcoming SIAST students and instructors to their legislature. I had a chance to address the group on the steps of the legislature this morning along with the Minister of Learning. We thanked them very much for taking their concern to the steps of this legislature.

I know that all members in this Assembly wish they were back in the classrooms and that they were able to complete their studies in a timely manner. I also understand that the group of instructors that are here would look forward to having the students back in the classroom.

So I ask all members to join with me in welcoming them to their legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, through you and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, a special guest in our Speaker's gallery today. It's Eileen Ackerman. She's the grandmother of Donovan Ackerman, one of our Pages, and with her is Donovan's father, Don Ackerman. I welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, it is my pleasure at this time to welcome to the Assembly two people who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. The first is David J. Carter who is a former member of the Legislative Assembly from Alberta, having been elected for the constituency of Calgary-Egmont. He served in the legislature from 1979 to 1993. He was twice elected Speaker and served that role from 1986 to 1993 in Alberta. Prior to that he was Anglican clergyman.

After his life in politics he has become an author, having authored three books. One called *Prairie Wings*, RAF, Medicine Hat; the second one *POW - Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*; and more recently the book called *Inspector F.J. Dickens*, North West Mounted Police.

I would like all members to welcome David Carter and with him as well is Mr. Doug Martin, chairman of the board for General Fasteners. Would that gentleman please rise.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader for the Opposition, member for Swift Current.

Saskatchewan Association of Community Living Initiative

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take some time this afternoon to talk a little bit about the Adopt an MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) campaign organized by the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living.

Mr. Speaker, many of us are familiar with the local community living associations within our constituencies in our home communities. However we may not be fully aware of the work they do in assisting individuals and family members living with an intellectual disability. That's why a group of parents decided to start this program, Mr. Speaker, to have the MLAs visit a family in their constituency, to be adopted by that family, and gain a greater understanding of what community living is all about.

I had the opportunity on Monday to visit with the Lenuik family in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker — mom, Phylis, and her five kids, Artell, Jolene, Penny, Lance and Valerie. We had a very nice visit that morning and I did learn a lot.

Mr. Speaker, Artell is the oldest of Phylis's children, she is 18 years old and has Down's syndrome. And it's truly amazing to hear what this particular family had to say about community living and about the things that they do as a family on a daily basis to come together on this particular issue and deal with the challenges, the unique challenges, they face.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to offer a sincere thank you to Lenuik family for inviting me into their home and taking the time to meet with them. I'd also like to thank the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living for its valuable contribution. I look forward to participating in the program again in the future, and all the members in this Assembly I'm sure will want to congratulate them for this program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Fairview.

Corner Gas Television Series

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to share with this Assembly today the good news that CTV (Canadian Television Network Limited) has ordered 18 new episodes of the television hit series *Corner Gas*. And tonight there will be a special screening of its next episode at the Canada-Saskatchewan Sound Stage.

Mr. Speaker, *Corner Gas* is the highest rated comedy of any original Canadian series this year. The show captures an outstanding 1.3 million viewers per week and attracts more people than *Hockey Night in Canada*. This Saskatchewan-made comedy series stars Tisdale-born comedian Brent Butt as well as fellow Saskatchewan natives and Gemini award winners Janet Wright and Eric Peterson.

Mr. Speaker, *Corner Gas* has announced it will begin filming its second season both in Rouleau and at the Canada-Saskatchewan Sound Stage. Brent Butt recently said,

and I quote, "Having the sound stage in Regina has made *Corner Gas* possible." Mr. Speaker, if some critics of the sound stage had their way, there might not be a *Corner Gas*.

The film industry is important to our economy, Mr. Speaker. Last year it reached production volumes of 47 million, and it accounts for 650 full-time jobs, many of them filled by young people who are able to pursue their dreams right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating CTV, Vérité Films, the producers, cast, and crew of *Corner Gas*, and all those involved with the sound stage for bringing about this Saskatchewan success story.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Eston-Elrose . . . for Rosetown-Elrose.

Achievements in Winter Sports

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. The season for winter sports is winding down in Saskatchewan, so I wish to inform all members of the legislature and the people of Saskatchewan of some outstanding achievements by athletes in the Rosetown-Elrose constituency.

The community of Kyle has first bragging rights with the crowning of two provincial championship hockey teams. The Kyle Pee Wee Elks, coached by Orin Sorenson and managed by Cathy Gillanders, defeated Davidson in the two-game, total-point series to claim the SHA (Saskatchewan Hockey Association) provincial C pee wee crown. The Kyle Senior Elks defeated Edam to claim the SHA provincial D title by winning two straight games in a best-of-three series. The senior team is coached by Ken Kelk and managed by Doug Hodgins.

I was able to attend the third game of a best-of-three series between the Eston Ramblers and the Bethune Bulldogs for the SHA provincial C championship for senior mens' hockey. The Bulldogs started out strong and built up a 3-0 lead. But Eston fought back and tied the game before the end of regulation team and then delighted hundreds of fans that made the trip from Eston to Bethune by popping in the winning goal in overtime. Eston's Ramblers are coached by Ben Pederson and managed by Rick Morrice.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the fine community of Rosetown hosted its famous Rose Bowl curling bonspiel the first weekend of April. Ninety-six teams from across Western Canada participated in this outstanding annual event in Rosetown.

(13:45)

Winners of the eight events included the A event, Ken Bell rink of Chilliwack, BC (British Columbia); the B event, Ron Hittel rink of Rosetown, I believe; C event, Keith Pike rink of Maidstone; D event, Elliott Cline team of Rosetown; E event, Dent Evans of Rosetown; F event, from Abbey; G event from Wilkie; and H event from Riverhurst.

Congratulations to all these fine champions . . . so many I don't have time to list them all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Nutana.

Dingwall Designer Guitars of Saskatoon

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, just around the corner from my constituency office is a studio that exemplifies the finest traditions of artisanship in Saskatchewan. I'm referring to Dingwall Designer Guitars where Sheldon Dingwall and his staff create finely crafted, handmade guitars.

On his Web site Sheldon states, and I quote:

Building instruments to me is the meeting place between the technical world of physics and engineering and the emotional world of soul and passion.

He and his staff approach their craft with a passion that borders on obsession. And it's evident in the instruments they produce.

Bass Player magazine said, quote:

The Dingwall Afterburner is an exceptional bass. Dingwall's uncompromising workmanship is world class.

And Dingwall's innovations made the magazine's list of "The 10 Most Important Gear Ideas of the Last 10 Years". Mr. Speaker, this winter one of the finest and most expensive guitars ever crafted in this province was built at Dingwall Designer Guitars. In January, Sheldon sold this work of art for more than \$9,300 to a dealer in Seattle. Upon receiving the guitar, the dealer promptly contacted Sheldon to order another.

I would ask all members of our Assembly to join me in congratulating everyone at Dingwall Designer Guitars on their fine work and for their outstanding contribution to Saskatchewan's ongoing tradition of excellence.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Community Spirit Award to Raymore

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2003 Grey Cup held at Taylor Field was without question one of the most successful Grey Cup celebrations in the history of the CFL (Canadian Football League). It was the great amount of Saskatchewan community spirit and volunteering that made this event so successful.

Well in advance of the big game, the Grey Cup committee began a fun competition where communities across Saskatchewan could vie for the first Community Spirit Award. I'm proud to say that the community of Raymore in my constituency demonstrated that a town of 625 people can certainly compete on that level.

Raymore indeed won this award by hosting a week-long celebration that ended in a special Grey Cup auction that

attracted more than 250 people. Raymore then went forward with a float in the Grey Cup Parade on November 15, capping off a tremendous rural effort towards promoting this annual Canadian celebration.

I would like to thank the community of Raymore for these efforts in showing that . . . all of the people of Saskatchewan across this province, a small town is quite able to accomplish big things. I would ask that all members join me congratulating the good folks of Raymore and their grand efforts celebrating our Grey Cup.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatchewan Rivers.

Prince Albert Business Awards

Mr. Borgerson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Prince Albert held its 2003 business awards named after Samuel McLeod, one of Prince Albert's early settlers. Samuel MacLeod's legacy is one of pioneering spirit, entrepreneurship, and civic leadership. And these same qualities are recognized in Prince Albert's business award recipients.

Mr. Speaker, the Samuel MacLeod Awards are a celebration of business success. They showcase the contributions and accomplishments of Prince Albert's business leaders and pay tribute to their commitment, dedication, and positive attitude.

Mr. Speaker, the New Product Service Award went to Star Development Corporation. Star Development also won the New Business Award. In the category of investment, Galaxy Cinemas Prince Albert was the winner. The award for Community Involvement went to Parkland Ambulance Care which also won in the service industry category. E.T. Flooring Canada won the award for Marketing. Job Creation went to Absolute Identification Security and Investigation. And, Mr. Speaker, Johns Nursery and Market Gardens was named Business of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues will join me in thanking the sponsors, committee members, and all those involved in hosting this event and in congratulating the finalists and winners of the 2003 Samuel McLeod Business Awards.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Fox Valley Sporting Accomplishments

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The small community of Fox Valley is once again in the forefront of sporting activities. On March 22, 18 team members of the Fox Valley Bantam Blues and their coaches headed into the final hockey game of the season with a 5 point lead in a two-game, total-point series. And by the end of the evening, they had captured the Saskatchewan Hockey Association Provincial D Championship, adding yet another provincial title banner to the local hockey arena.

And then on March 28, the Fox Valley Pee Wee Blues, after winning the Southern Championship, finished their provincial series as runners-up. Mr. Speaker, even a second-place finish at the provincial level is impressive.

Next we turn to curling. The team of Jared Brusky, Wade Martin, Kalin Deis, and Brenden Sulz represented the Fox Valley Curling Club at the juvenile provincial playdowns in Yorkton. The team, coached by Barry Martin, lost the A final, then won the B final, and qualified for a playoff spot and their second-place provincial finish. Now these boys can be very proud of their accomplishment since Jared has only been skipping that team since January of this year.

Mr. Speaker, these are significant accomplishments. The community of Fox Valley and surrounding area has a population of less than 700 residents and it serves an area which, by any standard, would have to be considered sparsely populated. For a community to achieve this kind of sporting success requires the support and involvement of virtually every resident in the area. And I'd like to acknowledge these recent accomplishments and all the fine athletes from the community of Fox Valley, and wish them well in next year's competition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Strike at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Learning. Yesterday I received an e-mail from an instructor at SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) that I would like to share with you. The instructor writes and I quote:

I watched you ask questions of the government on Budget day — you were told at the time that the legislature did not negotiate contracts, yet last Thursday, cabinet threw out a tentative agreement by SIAST management and SGEU negotiators.

The SGEU's (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) Web site also states, and I quote:

A number of issues were settled at the bargaining table but a proposal that went to Cabinet this morning was rejected.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: if both sides came to an agreement why did cabinet throw it out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell the members of this House that no item came to the cabinet on Thursday, no item was rejected by the cabinet on Thursday, and that the member should be careful in these situations to make sure that

he has accurate information.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, when the instructors of Saskatchewan come to me and tell me that this happened, when it's on an SGEU Web site, I tend to believe them.

Mr. Speaker, this morning on the steps of the legislature, the Minister of Learning told the students that were gathered there in protest, that he did not know how long the strike would go on. He couldn't provide the students with any answers as to the impact the strike would have on their education.

Earlier today I sent a letter to both the minister and the president of SGEU, Bob Bymoan, who is in the gallery today. In this letter the Saskatchewan Party proposed a 30-day cooling-off period as a means to getting instructors and students back to the classroom so that the majority of students could finish their school year, apprenticeship programs, and clinical rotations.

Can the minister tell the Assembly that this NDP government will support the Saskatchewan Party proposal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is suggesting is that we send the two parties to the corners, while what this party on the government side is trying to do is get them to the same table. Why on earth we would want to go through that process rather than bring the two parties together at the table to work through the discussions that broke off on Thursday, I don't understand. So if the member wants to clarify what it is this cooling-off period is, I would appreciate hearing it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I was very clear in my letter what the cooling-off period meant. It was a way to get students back to the classroom.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — What students want in Saskatchewan are creative solutions. This government seems to be very creative in creating taxes for Saskatchewan people, but not solutions to labour negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, Pat Olson of Quill Lake is trying to complete the clinical portion of her primary care nurse practitioner program through SIAST. Pat already works as a full-time RN (registered nurse) and has been working for three and a half years through distance education in this advanced nursing program. She has

taken time off work to finish these clinical rotations but yesterday, Mr. Speaker, she was told she could not continue with her clinical at Royal University Hospital because of the strike and she was asked to leave. Quote:

I am tired of the run around and I want to finish this portion of my certification and work in my chosen profession as a Nurse Practitioner. I cannot continue with the stress of not working, not finishing my course, no income, and extra expenses.

Pat Olson is worried about her loss of income and how it'll affect the family farm; and also, the strike could cause her to lose her job.

Can the minister today assure Pat Olson that she will be able to complete her clinical rotation on time?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I've previously advised this Assembly we are working on a program-by-program basis to deal with this situation that students are facing.

What the member opposite seems to want — or it at least appears from his letter that he wants — is for the parties to go back to work and to go back to the table. This is exactly what this government has been advocating. This is exactly the approach that we have presented. There are only two ways to end up with this result. One is through a negotiated settlement, the other is through back-to-work legislation.

This side has said we favour a negotiated settlement. If the members opposite want something different, they should introduce that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — The minister's don't worry, be happy attitude is wearing a little thin. What people want across the province is a creative solution to this labour dispute. Dennis David of Saskatoon wrote me a letter last week and outlined how the SIAST strike was affecting him. He is a student in the eight-week apprenticeship program at Kelsey Campus in Saskatoon. To date, Dennis has lost three weeks of his course. And he writes:

I also do not have the time or the money to make up these courses . . . and cannot afford to live on unemployment for an extra 3 or 4 weeks or however many . . . (weeks it takes).

I am expected back at work on the 1st of May . . . extending my school year into May will just cost me more money and cause me to lose valuable hours working in the trade. I need some answers now because I am ready to quit the program and just go back to work. I know this will just hurt me but I'm running out of patience, time and money.

To the minister: what specific steps is this NDP government

doing to ensure apprenticeship students don't lose their courses?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I have previously advised this Assembly of the work that was being done with the conciliator. I would remind the member opposite that that is work that brought the parties back to the table, where I believe that we were very close to seeing an agreement. I cannot tell the Assembly what it was that caused SGEU to walk off the job again this week. I don't have that answer.

I believe still that we are close to an agreement. I have encouraged the instructors and their union leadership to take their employees back to work so that we can continue the negotiations during that time period in a way that will not jeopardize the year that the students have worked on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's words are ringing empty. For three weeks now we've heard the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, the minister may remember Colleen Schick — Colleen, a SIAST student in business administration. She lit up the airwaves last week on call-in shows warning that the strike was having a significant impact on students' emotional and financial well-being.

Colleen was very critical of this government and of this minister. Well, Mr. Speaker, the strike has definitely had an effect on Colleen. She is no longer a student. As a single mom, Colleen was forced to drop out and take a job to support her family. She couldn't afford to wait it out. She couldn't afford to wait for this minister.

Can the minister guarantee that no further students will have to drop out of school to meet their schedule?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — This whole line of questioning is ridiculous in that it refuses to respect the collective bargaining process. The government does not dictate the terms of the collective bargaining process. This is something that needs to be worked out at the table.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was of the view that last Thursday that we were very close to an agreement. What happened at that table, in that time period, I'm not in a position to say. I understand that a large number of the issues have been resolved, that there are a very small number of issues left to work through — small but sizable.

The only place that can be resolved . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I should say few number but sizable. The only place that this can be resolved, Mr. Speaker, is at the bargaining table. Those negotiations can occur without the employees walking

the picket lines. And that is what I think is the best approach for us to move forward.

If the member opposite wants legislation to force instructors back, he should introduce it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what is ridiculous. What is ridiculous is this Minister of Learning's total lack of regard for students across Saskatchewan.

The minister opposite asked the Saskatchewan Party to come up with suggestions, and we have. The Saskatchewan Party's proposal of a 30-day cooling-off period would allow instructors to return to the classroom and in turn enable most students to complete their exams, courses, and apprenticeship programs. Meanwhile negotiators from both sides could return to the bargaining table.

This proposal would effectively remove students from their positions as pawns in this dispute and allow them to complete their studies without further disruption.

Can the minister commit today to the Saskatchewan Party proposal of a 30-day cooling-off period under serious consideration? And if not, can he suggest today a better idea?

(14:00)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I can absolutely suggest a better idea. The better idea is the employees go back to the classrooms, that the negotiations continue at the table, and that we work through a collective agreement.

This idea of some 30-day cooling-off period is ridiculous. It means nothing. It is a simple cliché, and I don't see how the member can stand in this Assembly with a straight face and argue that this is any kind of creative solution.

The best option here is for both parties to go back to the table and finish working through the agreement that they were, I believe, nearly at last week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Financial Support for Education

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. One of the reasons that people of Saskatchewan are so angry about the NDP (New Democratic Party) budget is that it delivers a lot of pain in the short term and even more pain in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, what this NDP budget has done is delivered a truckload of broken campaign promises. Last week the agriculture producers of Saskatchewan were on the steps of the legislature to protest the NDP's broken promises on education property tax relief, as well as the lack of plan for growth of this province. APAS's (Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan) president, Terry Hildebrandt, says next year's NDP budget could be even more of a disaster.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain to families why the NDP broke another campaign promise and failed to reduce property tax, the education of property tax in this year's budget?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as we have many times said in this Assembly, there is in fact \$28 million in this budget specifically targeted to municipalities and school boards to allow them to take the pressure off of property tax.

The members opposite have stood in this Assembly day after day tabling petitions saying, whatever you do, do not implement that Boughen report. Then they stand up in the House and they say, what are you doing to implement the Boughen report? It's that kind of inconsistency that makes no sense and shows the lack of credibility the opposition members have.

If they are in fact sincere about this, they will understand that what we need to do is to do a number of things to deal with this problem — including working through a new approach to foundation operating grant; including working through how we deal with amalgamation; and working through how we can get a system that makes sure that money flows from the provincial treasury into the school system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, APAS says the NDP's lack of vision for how to get Saskatchewan growing will mean likely the tax load on property will get even heavier next year. And SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) is holding a special meeting this week to talk about the NDP's failure to deliver on campaign promises of education property tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's broken promises are fuelling calls for education property tax revolts in many municipalities — municipalities that held tax revolt meetings four years ago and the issue still hasn't been addressed, even though promise after promise from this Premier has fallen on deaf ears in cabinet, obviously.

Mr. Speaker, can this NDP government promise lower education property tax this year and next . . . in the next year's budget?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Our commitment is to make sure that education . . . it remains a priority in this province. It is the

second largest priority area of this government. And the members opposite last week voted against the budget that provided new money for health care, new money for education, and new money for agriculture. They voted against that, Mr. Speaker.

They stand up in this House and they say, what are you doing to make sure that property taxes go down? Well we introduced the budget that had new money in it, that they voted against. No new solutions. No creative solutions. No consistent position. Different, different leader; same Sask Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer of putting more money into education . . . they put \$18 million into education, which 17 million of that is eaten up on teachers' contracts that is only due, that will be up for renegotiation as of August. That leaves \$1 million to be spread across this whole province.

Ask school divisions around this province what the increase that they put on the PST (provincial sales tax) will do to that \$1 million across the province. It does absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, school divisions like Moose Jaw will be receiving 300,000 less dollars this year than they did last year. The chairperson of the Regina Public School Division was in the paper on Saturday . . . on Tuesday, talking about their shortfall of \$2.2 million. Mr. Speaker, school divisions around this province are looking at either teacher cuts or increasing property tax.

How can the minister say that they've addressed the Premier's promise of reducing education portion of property tax when school divisions around this province are talking about raising property taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, the funding that is provided from the provincial government is . . . goes into the foundation operating grant. This is a long-standing approach that we have used in terms of distributing it back out. This is an approach that is agreed to by the school board association. If the member opposite is advocating now something different than that, he should say so.

In terms of the situation the individual school boards will need to deal with, they will need to make sure that they deal with their local circumstance. Provincial funding is there. It is there in record amount and it is there to help keep property taxes down.

If the member opposite thinks it's not sufficient, I would ask him to tell me how much is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, it's not only our caucus that is telling this government it is not sufficient. School divisions, school boards around this province are telling you that it isn't sufficient, there is not enough money, that you didn't put enough money in.

You put enough money in to cover the teachers' contract and that is it. It goes nowhere close to this Premier's promise as he walked around the province meeting people in the eye saying yes, we will reduce the education portion of property tax around the province. And you've done nothing to address that issue.

Mr. Speaker, it's another broken promise; it's another promise that they're trying to gloss over. And people around the province, RMs (rural municipality) around this province are going to be looking at tax revolt meetings because of the lack of funding for education.

When will this government start funding education the way it should?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — There is \$1.2 billion in this budget for education — 1.2 billion. That's the number that this side supports in terms of an increased share of education. What is it that that number comes from that party . . . support for. What is the amount of money?

The post-secondary critic stands up in his speech and criticizes us for not providing more to the University of Saskatchewan. He then stands up and criticizes us for not providing more for salaries for SIAST. The K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) critic stands up and says, well we go to have more money in there for property tax reduction. And you can go up and you can go down the rows and every single member says, spend more money.

I say to those members, tell us how it is that you can spend more money at the same time you're supposed to be cutting taxes and balancing the budget. I ask those members, tell us what that number is they want for education spending.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, the problem with this NDP government over the last four years and going on into the future is they have absolutely no idea on how to grow this economy, on how to grow the population of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — There is a third way. They fail to see it, Mr.

Speaker. Mr. Speaker, instead all they can see is make a promise to get elected one day and then raise taxes the next day, Mr. Speaker. They're looking at a \$135 million increase in the PST as well as forcing school divisions across the province to increase property taxes.

Is that what you promised in this election? Is that what the Premier promised in this election, Mr. Speaker? It isn't. He promised to cut property tax, but what did he do? He increased the PST by \$135 million.

How can this Premier go out and talk anything about what he's going to do in the future and have people believe him because they can't believe him in the past, Mr. Speaker. What is this government going to do to properly fund education?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well I think the member opposite must have missed the budget speech where we talked about how the increase in the PST would be used to partially offset — partially offset — the increase in health care spending, not to mention that there was still increased money for municipalities, still increased money for school boards to help deal with the property tax increase. A record \$1.2 billion this year will be spent in education — 1.2 billion. The only department that fared better than the Department of Education in terms of a spending increase was the Department of Health.

This government's priorities are on health care services, education services, and we have made additional money available for cash-strapped farmers. Those are the priorities on this side. What are the priorities on that side?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current.

Attendance at Energy Conference

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's radical thinking but the priorities on this side of the House are to tell the truth, to keep promises to the people of the province. Mr. Speaker, that's the priorities on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the western . . . On the Western Governors' Association Web site . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Western Governors' Association Web site today has an article. It says:

The Western Governors' Association kicked off the North American Energy Summit Wednesday, (that's today) April 14, in Albuquerque, New Mexico with a call from Govs. Bill Richardson (the host governor), WGA Chairman, and

Arnold Schwarzenegger . . . (to have a discussion and a conference on the issue of energy efficient and) opportunities in the West.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that today Ralph Klein, the Premier of Alberta, will be a keynote speaker. Friday, NDP Premier Gary Doer will be a keynote speaker, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier isn't even bothering to show up on an issue as important to this.

I wonder if the Premier would explain to this Assembly and to the people of the province why he's not even bothering to attend a conference this important.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the answer's very simple. I wanted to be in the province this week to watch Saskatchewan grow. I tell you, Mr. Speaker, here's the good news — these folks all the time concentrating on the bad news; these folks concentrating on the good news.

I want you to know, Mr. Speaker, this week the population of Saskatchewan grew. There's one new citizen in our province; his name is Graham Mandryk, came in here at about 9 pounds, a little more than that. And I want to congratulate his father, who sits up here in the press gallery.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now, Mr. Speaker, my only disappointment in this news is that the proud father is not on paternity leave.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I would just say this. The opposition members would certainly want to congratulate Mr. Mandryk as well. And as prolific as he might be, he alone cannot solve the population problems of the province. We're going to need a change in government in order to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the question's pretty serious, though. The question's very serious. We hear the Premier talking about a green and prosperous economy almost every time he's on his feet. This week governors of 21 states and a number of premiers — the Premier of Alberta, the Premier of Manitoba — are gathering together to discuss that very issue. The Premier of Saskatchewan however will not be there, notwithstanding his claims to want to build a green and prosperous economy or to make Saskatchewan energy capital. The Saskatchewan Party believes the Premier should be there. We would have co-operated to make it happen. Why is the Premier not there? Why is he not showing leadership for the province of Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I wish, I wish I were there.

The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. We are giving leadership to this province by maintaining solid government work in this side of the House. Now I would wish we had a majority that would allow me to do the kind of travel that I wish I could do and that would allow ministers of the Crown to do the kind of travel they would wish to do.

We have representatives in New Mexico at the meeting, Mr. Speaker, and this does not change for one moment the intention and the purpose and the drive of this government to see a green and a prosperous economy — an economy that will grow on the tremendous energy potential of Saskatchewan, both those energy resources beneath the ground and those energy resources above the ground, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting answer. Last month the opposition co-operated so the Minister of Agriculture could go down to Minnesota to discuss agriculture issues. BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) was talked about there. Our Finance critic has indicated to the minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please, members. Order. Once again . . . Order. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, our Finance critic has already agreed to attend to meetings in Ottawa so the Minister of Finance can make the case for equalization. So I don't understand the Premier's excuse. I don't understand why he wouldn't be showing leadership on this issue.

Clean energy — that's his campaign promise as well, Mr. Speaker. We hear it day after day, a plan to build a green and prosperous economy. Here are the leaders of 21 states, here are the premiers of Manitoba and Alberta attending to that very issue. And the Premier sits in his chair. Why isn't he showing leadership on this issue, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, you know, if today I was in New Mexico I know what this opposition would be saying: why is the Premier not in the province dealing with the issues facing the people of Saskatchewan? You can be, you can be sure about that, Mr. Speaker. There is never going to be a day we'll satisfy that opposition. But that's not, that's not my worry. It's not my worry to satisfy this opposition. It's my worry and the worry of this government to govern for the people of Saskatchewan, and that's what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker.

(14:15)

And we are going to take this energy sector which we have grown significantly, significantly in the past two years, and we're going to see growth on growth. Mr. Speaker, you can be sure about that because we have this tremendous potential.

And it doesn't mean we need to be at all of the conferences. We'll be there. Our representatives are there. We'll be there when we can. But, Mr. Speaker, this does not change the fact of

the matter the energy industry in this province has grown significantly under this administration, and it's going to show tremendous growth in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the Premier's answers just ring very, very hollow. When the Minister of Agriculture attended to his meeting in Minnesota, there was certainly no criticism from this side of the House. Rather, rather we facilitated the trip by sending the critic. When the Minister of Finance asked that our Finance critic attend to meetings in Ottawa with respect to equalization, we didn't, we didn't criticize the government. We won't criticize the government. We will co-operate with the government. We've also made an offer to be there in terms of equalization in other ways.

So what is the answer? Will the Premier not want to show some leadership on this issue, an issue he campaigned on? Is he tired? What is the reason why he wouldn't be at an important meeting such as this, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'll see what I can do about getting a trip for the Leader of the Opposition sometime before the end of the session. The fact of the matter is, today, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is well represented at that conference, that important conference. And we will be represented in future by sometimes elected and sometimes by officials.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter remains. This government has a determination, a fundamental determination to see a green and prosperous economy in this province. We've taken steps. We're building on those steps, and we will see that prosperous green and . . . prosperous economy in the future of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — And why is the member for Meadow Lake on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The member for Meadow Lake has requested leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to the Assembly, several folks seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

Seated in the gallery is Jennifer Vollet and her son, Zachary. Jennifer and Zachary have just moved back from Alberta here to Saskatchewan — to Moosomin precisely, Mr. Speaker. Her mother, Jennifer's mother, used to work here in the building in the 1970s under the leadership of then Premier Blakeney.

And I would ask all members to please welcome Jennifer and Zachary to the Assembly today please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

New Cypress Regional Hospital

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide the members of the Legislative Assembly and the residents of southwestern Saskatchewan with some very exciting news. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to announce that Saskatchewan Health and the Cypress Regional Health Authority are moving forward with the next step of the new \$32 million regional hospital to be built in Swift Current.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I'm pleased to announce that our government has approved the functional program for the project. This means, Mr. Speaker, that the design work and other planning necessary for construction can begin.

The new Cypress regional hospital supports our government's commitment in the Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care to build a strong network of hospitals across the province so that we can improve access to care for all residents. Today's announcement, Mr. Speaker, is just another example of how our government is making strategic investments that will ensure the delivery of high-quality health care services, now and into the future.

The new Cypress regional hospital is in keeping with our strategic plan and will offer a broad range of health care services including internal medicine and other specialty care, general surgery and intensive care. These improvements to the hospital will contribute to a more efficient and coordinated approach to delivering health care services in southwestern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, these major capital projects do not happen on their own. They take strong community leadership, commitment, partnerships, and involvement. Today's announcement embodies all of those elements. I would like to thank the residents of the Cypress Health Region for working together so diligently with Saskatchewan Health to move this project forward. This is indeed good news for the residents of southwestern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and it is also good news for all Saskatchewan citizens.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier and the government, I'd like to congratulate the Cypress Regional Health Authority and the people of southwestern Saskatchewan for their part in building a better health care system and a better future. Thank

you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Swift Current, the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to respond very briefly to the minister's ministerial statement with respect to the next phase of the Swift Current hospital development.

First of all I'd just say on behalf of the constituents of Swift Current, the community of Swift Current and myself as a local MLA, are grateful for this government's commitment to this new regional facility for Swift Current.

It's an important project. It's important not just for the community of Swift Current; it's important for the region. And I'd argue, Mr. Speaker, it's also important for the broader system, even those tertiary centres. To the extent that we're better equipped and able to treat people in Swift Current, we're going to be able to relieve pressure from the system.

I think in this additional announcement of an announcement that was made some time ago — the re-announcement if you like, Mr. Speaker — I would also say it would be important for all of us to thank, thank and recognize the thousands of residents of southwest Saskatchewan — thousands of them — who signed petitions, who made them available in this Assembly.

I know that my colleagues grew very tired of me presenting those petitions day after day after day. And you can hear them responding to that. I'm assuming . . . I hear the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Northcote's chirping, and maybe some on the government's side were tired of it. But those residents that organized that petition and those who signed it I think performed an effective and important function and role in getting to this day.

At the end of the day though, it took a government to hear what they were saying and to do the right thing. That continues to happen. The government is recommitted to this project, and we're on to the next phase.

I would also say this very, very briefly, Mr. Speaker, that as we await to hear more about the scope of this, of the Swift Current hospital project. There may be fewer beds than there are currently available in the hospital. And that in itself may not be as troublesome as it is in the context of potential bed closures around Swift Current, in the rural areas. If we lose long-term care beds or if hospitals, if other beds, acute care beds, are closed in the region around Swift Current, the fact that there may be fewer in this facility has some people concerned.

So that's something we'll be monitoring, but we're grateful in Swift Current for this announcement to the minister and to the government, and we look forward to the day when there is a brand new hospital in the frontier city. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 22 — The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 22, The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read for the first time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Agriculture and Food that Bill No. 22, The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read for the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

The Deputy Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time? I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Next sitting of this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, members, I would like to table two reports. They're both from the Office of the Provincial Auditor. One is the report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan on the 2003 financial statements of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), Crown corporations and related entities dated April 2004.

The second is the report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan on the financial statements of Crown agencies for the years ending in the 2003 calendar year dated also April 2004.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — And before we proceed to orders of the day I would like to make a statement regarding a point of order that was raised. On Thursday, April 8, 2004, the member for The Battlefords raised a point of order concerning the quotation of electronic mail in debate. The member cited paragraphs 498 and 499 of the 6th edition of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms* to make a case that electronic mail, like telegrams, should not be quoted in the Assembly because there's no way of ensuring the authenticity of the signature.

He went on to argue that if it is permissible to quote electronic mail in the Assembly then the member should be required to indicate who has written the e-mail. I have reviewed this issue with respect to this Assembly's practice and the applicable parliamentary authorities. Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states on page 517 that members may quote from private correspondence as long as they identify the sender by name or take full responsibility for its contents. Members of the House of Commons have been required to take responsibility for the comments of unsigned or anonymous letters.

This is wholly consistent with the practices of this Assembly. Members are at liberty to quote signed or unsigned letters as they wish to support an argument. They are not required to identify the sender of a letter, but then they are required to take responsibility for the contents of what they quote. This extends to both the content and accuracy of the material they cite.

There's one exception to this practice which relates to the members' responsibility for the content of a quotation. It is out of order to read any document that contains language that would be out of order if spoken by the member directly.

And while on the topic of citing correspondence, I want to remind the Assembly that private members are not obliged to table documents cited in debate, but if a minister quotes a letter it must be tabled on request. Given the Assembly's practice on the quotation of documents, it is the Speaker's ruling that electronic mail may be quoted without identifying the author, but it can only be done so if the member takes full responsibility for its content. With the respect to the propriety of electronic mail, it is the Speaker's ruling that it be treated the same way as any other document or correspondence that is cited in the Assembly.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a response to written question no. 155.

The Speaker: — Response to 155 has been tabled. I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table . . . pardon me, convert for debate returnable, questions 156, 157.

The Speaker: — Questions 156 and 157 have been converted to orders for return (debatable). I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table written responses to questions 158 through 162 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 158, 159, 160, 161 and 162 have been tabled. I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to stand and convert for debates returnable, questions no. 163 and 164.

The Speaker: — Questions 163 and 164 converted to orders for return (debatable). I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a written response to question no. 165.

The Speaker: — The response to 165 has been tabled.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 1, An Act to amend The Financial Administration Act, 1993.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. We are on government motions.

Deputy Clerk: — No. 1, Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen.

An Hon. Member: — Stand.

The Speaker: — Stand the motion.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 1 — The Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 1, An Act to amend The Financial Administration Act, 1993.

The amendments in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, pertain to the financial administration of the Government of Saskatchewan. There have been no substantial amendments to The Financial Administration Act since 1993. Amendments are to address issues and procedure changes that have arisen since 1993. The amendments also address minor administrative and housekeeping issues helping us to take care of business a little bit more effectively.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will help to approve administrative efficiency. They demonstrate the government's continued commitment to sound financial management, transparency, accountability, and controlled spending.

Mr. Speaker, the main provisions in this bill are as follows. A key amendment provides for interim funding beginning on April 1, based on one-twelfth of the previous year's estimates.

Mr. Speaker, this provision will improve the transition from one

fiscal year to the next. It allows for critical payments to be made on a timely basis at the beginning of a fiscal year prior to passing an interim supply Bill. This funding becomes part of the next Appropriation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this provision does not apply to new programs. New programs would continue to require interim supply Bills. The provision applies to continuing programs and services from the previous fiscal year. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island have similar provisions to ease the transition into a new fiscal year by providing funding.

Mr. Speaker, another key amendment provides for net budgeting within the General Revenue Fund in certain limited situations. This net budgeting provision permits, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, spending actual revenues generated through commercial type activities. What I mean by commercial type activities is providing property, goods, or services. The money earned from these activities can be used to pay for costs directly related to the activities.

For example, the Department of Highways and Transportation could do roadwork for a rural municipality knowing the costs will be reimbursed by the RM at a later point. Revenues that are clearly not of a commercial type nature do not qualify for net budgeting.

Mr. Speaker, this would mean revenues from taxation, non-renewable resources, CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer), equalization, dividends from CIC, and the Liquor and Gaming Authority would not qualify for net budgeting.

Mr. Speaker, this provision will help to improve efficiency because it provides the framework for commercial type organizations to operate within the General Revenue Fund. With net budgeting, transparency and accountability remains intact. The estimates and the public accounts documents that are closely examined by the legislature and the public will show information related to net budgeted activities. The Public Account will report gross revenues and expenditures related to these activities.

Another key amendment, Mr. Speaker, establishes authority for one department to provide services to, or administer grants for, other departments and recover costs from other departments. This amendment provides explicit authority for departments to provide services such as information technology support to other departments.

In simple terms, Mr. Speaker, the department receiving the services reimburses the department providing the services. Each department shows its share of the cost. It also gives authority for one department to administer a grant or grant program that is shared with another department. For example, the Kids First program is administered by Learning but spans across three departments: Learning, Health, and Community Resources and Employment. Again this amendment will increase administrative efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill also updates the payment certification sections of the Act. This update will provide flexibility to rely on technology where appropriate. For example, the government

implemented a new financial system on April 1, 2003. The new system is able to automatically match invoices with goods received and make a payment, but the current Act requires manual processes. Changes to the Act are needed to provide authority to use the new technology.

In summary, new technology opens the door for improved and streamlined processes both now and in the future. Changes to the Act will help to capitalize on these opportunities and improve efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the administrative efficiency of improvements mentioned, this Bill includes minor administrative and housekeeping changes. The amendments are . . . also remove reference to the Consolidated Fund. The Consolidated Fund was renamed as the General Revenue Fund in 1993. Consequential amendments to other legislation are required to replace Consolidated Fund with General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Speaker, another amendment will remove reference to the specific information that must be included in the General Revenue Fund in summary financial statements. As accounting standards issued by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants evolve, the Act would not have to be changed to reflect new or changed requirements. The amendments will be effective upon assent but will be retroactive to April 1, 2004 to coincide with the start of the new fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to accountability, transparency, and fiscal prudence. Procedures and regulations will remain in place to ensure spending is reviewed, debated, approved, monitored, and reported on. These amendments simply make it easier to conduct regular business.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Financial Administration Act, 1993.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 1, The Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time.

I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and to speak on this second reading debate of The Financial Administration Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill that I think has been a long time coming. When I had the pleasure of first serving as the Chair of the Legislative Public Accounts Committee, I believe it was in about 1995, '96, '97, the auditor of the day, Mr. Strelloff, I recall was very much insisting that the Government of Saskatchewan get on the program in terms of summary financial statements and consolidated reporting processes. And all through those years it seemed always as if the government was reluctant to do that and to move forward with this kind of information.

And so when the minister introduces the second reading debate today, I think that the concept embedded in this legislation of

net budgeting is a very important concept that has been promoted by Mr. Strelloff as our previous provincial auditor, and Mr. Fred Wendel as the current Provincial Auditor . . . have called and almost virtually every one of their reports that summary financial statements are the way that we should move forward to the future.

Mr. Speaker, we understand and we are hopeful as we get into the details of this Bill that what has been called for by provincial auditors is indeed going to be the detail that's in this legislation. And those kinds of details we'll want to talk about and ask questions about when we move to committee.

But today, Mr. Speaker, there's a number of aspects to this Bill that I want to talk about in outlining our reaction to what we've heard from the minister and what we've seen from the draft of the Bill that was presented.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has been on record over a good number of years supporting this concept — the summary financial statements and complete reporting. And we think that it's important for a number of reasons.

Because first of all we think that the people of this province and the people in this Assembly should have the easiest time possible in order to understand the complete assets and resources of the government.

Members will likely be familiar and I'm sure the public at large watching realize that 60 per cent of the activity of government is in the General Revenue Fund and some 40 per cent of the activity, the financial activities of government, are actually outside of that General Revenue Fund, in the Crowns and Crown agencies and things of that nature.

What is being proposed to do with this net budgeting and consolidated financial statements is to bring all of this information together on a consolidated financial statement so that when we have a budget going forward in the future we see the entire assets and liabilities, the entire revenue and expenses of the government.

And so we don't have this kind of jiggery-pokery going on, pretending that we can take money from an imaginary Fiscal Stabilization Fund, put it into the General Revenue Fund, and pretend that the budget is miraculously balanced. That simply is not an accurate reflection of the net effect of the financial picture of the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's important for all of our citizens to understand the true fiscal position. And it seems just a little bit disingenuous that even in this most recent budget, the statement by the Finance minister was is that the budget is balanced. Well, Mr. Speaker, taking money from your line of credit or charging items on your credit card outside of the General Revenue Fund in order to balance the budget is not being fair to the people of Saskatchewan's ability to understand what the true financial picture of the province really is.

And so, Mr. Speaker, this I hope is going to be a real commitment finally at long last — after so many years of provincial auditors and the official opposition asking for this consolidated principle — so that we could see all the activities

of government on the budget, that this is an important aspect that the government is going to implement in its entirety as has been recommended by the provincial auditors. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's important so that people can really understand where this province is heading.

You know it has been a very turbulent time. When this government under Mr. Romanow was first elected, they found themselves in a very difficult financial position and they took concrete steps, difficult steps, in order to get to a balanced position, not just in the General Revenue Fund but in a combined consolidated financial report. They took some measures to make sure that happened and Finance minister Janice MacKinnon was very diligent in terms of getting that together.

It's unfortunate that on the election of the current Premier that that scrutiny and that determination to keep the budget balanced in its entirety kind of slipped through this Premier's fingers.

And ever since this Premier has been elected, we have been running deficit budgets. And the current administration keeps trying to say that these budgets are balanced. Well on a combined financial statement, the Provincial Auditor has substantiated that no way on earth are these budgets balanced. In reality, we've been running consecutive deficits in the province and it is accumulating in a very concerning manner.

Since this Premier has been elected, almost \$2 billion in new debt has been rung up by the province of Saskatchewan. And all the while, the message from the government and from Finance ministers has been that the budget is being balanced. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think any fair-minded person can see very clearly that if you're ringing up 2 extra billion dollars in debt, you are not balancing the budget.

And hopefully when these financial statements are changed so this is accurately reflected, this kind of smoke-and-mirrors program that has been going on and perpetuated by this government will disappear and we'll see in the light of day what exactly is happening — as in this current budget, in excess of \$300 million is going to be spent in excess of revenues. That, by any ordinary person's definition, is indeed a deficit. It isn't a balanced budget as has been projected by this budget.

Mr. Speaker, this is concerning because if we don't have the information at our fingertips about what the true challenges are of this province, if we don't have — when we scrutinize the budget — the ability to see where a plan is in place to grow the province, if we can't have this information properly and fully at our fingertips, it's very difficult to imagine how we're going to make proper financial decisions.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we think that it is important that this information is there. We think it's important that we can use this information to hold the government account. We think it's important that we balance and weigh the decisions made in the details of a budget in the various departments on the expenditure side, against this entire picture, to say, what is happening in the province?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's equally important in a combined financial statement to understand what's happening with our

Crown corporations because, as I said, on average approximately 40 per cent of the financial activity of government is conducted off General Revenue Fund.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's equally important for us to understand and know what the priorities and activities are going to be of our Crown corporations. The government, we the citizens — as the shareholders of these Crown corporations — have a responsibility and an obligation, and indeed an expectation, that these Crown corporations are going to function in the best interests of the citizens of Saskatchewan.

(14:45)

And so when they go into these wild adventures offshore and they lose money for the people of the province, they're not going to be able to sort of slough this off on a little line item in a Crown corporation's report that gets buried in some obscure committee. What they're going to have to show is these net activities of the Crown corporations as part of the whole financial framework of the province.

And so, Mr. Speaker, Deputy Speaker, we're going to be able to see in the light of a clear budget document, I hope, that we're going to be able to see and have financial reporting about some of these wild adventures in Australia or Atlanta, Georgia, or who knows where and be able to say that our Crown corporations, which are part of the ownership of the province, are conducting themselves in a responsible way. And if they had made different decisions or better decisions about some of these wild investments, we might have 10, 20, 30, \$50 million, whatever has been lost, available for priorities like health or education.

And when you can look at this on a consolidated financial statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that gives us something to work with in a concrete and intelligent manner. Not only for ourselves in this legislature because we eventually learn all the details of how the process works here — what's important is that the citizens of Saskatchewan understand the priorities of our governments.

The people of Saskatchewan have to understand by seeing these consolidated financial statements that when something as nonsensical as saving so-called \$100,000 and keeping the parks closed for an extra month in spring is supposedly going to save \$100,000 and at the same time we're wasting money in the Crown corporations or in other activities, the people of Saskatchewan need to see the entire picture so that they can make a valid judgment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have to understand that when they're being asked to close rural agricultural service centres right across this province and public servants who have provided needed and very valuable agricultural advice to our farm families in this province, they want to see, if that if this is supposed to save money, then they want the answer to why we're wasting money in other aspects of the government operations.

And by having these combined financial statements they have the opportunity finally of seeing this with some clarity — and I think that that's an important point that really has to be stressed

and I believe my colleagues will stress this over the next number of days as this debate continues — because it is so important to the very principle of how we're going to understand the way government works in order to make valid and important and good judgment decisions about the priorities in the spending as we scrutinize this government's budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's important that this be done in the full light of day and not shuffled off into little committees so that it can be kind of moved into a less prominent manner. This is important for the very essence of the development of the province to understand the entire fiscal position of this province, and the consolidated financial statements are an important tool in order for this to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues are going to speak a lot more about this specific aspect of The Financial Administration Amendment Act because it is so fundamental to the very underpinning of good and proper government accountability. And I think that's important.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister in his presentation and his remarks today also outlined very briefly some of the other aspects of this Bill, and I would like to also comment on some of them very briefly.

I think it's valuable . . . In the past as members would know, and I think people who are in third party agencies and government departments recognize that very often the budget is only able to be delivered very close to the end of the government's fiscal year of March 31. That's a reality because of circumstances that need to be included in a provincial budget like what the federal budget is going to be, what the transfers and equalization payments and those kinds of monies that are important to our province are going to be available to our government.

So it's a realistic expectation that provincial budgets are going to normally be tabled very close to the end of the fiscal year. And as we saw this year, we actually ended up into a situation where we agreed with the government to interrupt the budget debate in order to deal with making sure that government had such funds as it needed in order to continue its business and the priorities of the spending of departments and third party agencies which is very important.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it's our understanding that a part of this amendment is going to be to provide a framework where it basically says that one-twelfth of the proposed budget that is being tabled will be provided by way of an automatic, or a more automatic appropriation. So that we don't have to interrupt budget debate, so we don't have to go through this in a special day at the legislature, that it becomes something as a routine for better budget planning, and so that departments can know that they can count on the monies being available for their programs and services for the period beginning April 1 through the month of April — which gives the legislature more time then to be into the budget consideration process, to then vote any subsequent amounts to be used subject to the final budget approval process in this legislature.

So I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this proposal is a reasonable one, and certainly as long as everyone understands

that this is a routine amendment and a routine adjustment and modification to our current practice, and that the budget scrutiny process still is going to be very comprehensive and detailed, that this as well merits consideration.

Mr. Speaker, the minister also mentioned that there has been some level of improvement needed in terms of interdepartmental accounting practice, if you like. The minister indicated in his remarks that this legislation is going to provide a framework for actually allowing a very clear determination when there are programs that affect more than one department — specifically, how those programs are going to be costed between the departments.

Or if one department is going to take a lead and provide services for another department and the first department providing the service incurs a cost, there's going to be a methodology of actually properly accounting for cost transfers, if you like, to the budgets of other departments.

And we think insofar as that clarifies again the budget process, we think that this is valuable. The object of the exercise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, surely must be to make sure all of these issues are done in a way that provides a budget document and a budget document scrutiny process that is more open, is more transparent, is more accountable, and is more comprehensive and complete. And brings everything into the picture in a way that is fair not only to the government, but also to the opposition and all of the citizens in the province; so that there can be as much understanding as possible in the true fiscal position of the province. And so we are interested in the details of this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister also said there is various other administrative changes that need to be made in order to clear up minor points about how the financial administration of the province is actually conducted. And we are going to be very interested in having detailed discussions with all of these specific details as time passes and we move through the budget process and the Bill consideration process. And I know our members are going to be very interested in making sure this happens.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that this legislation has the potential of being very important for the province of Saskatchewan. I know that there has been calls for this type of change to the legislation for a number of years. It certainly has been something that the official opposition has been encouraging the government to do. And we think that it is important that the government at this time and the Finance minister has brought this legislation forward.

We trust and hope that the responses that we're going to get from people who have been commenting on this very issue over the years, people like the auditor, people like financial experts who will look into the details of this legislation to see if indeed the stated principles that the minister has outlined . . . And we are pretty much in support of those principles. We're going to need to see that if the actual wording and the details and the framework and the body of the legislation is going to embody those principles and are going to make sure that they're done properly. We're going to need to look at that and talk about it, and we're going to need the input of a lot of financial experts to make sure, since this is an opportunity for this legislation to

change, that we get it right.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to facilitate that process, we're most interested in hearing from these experts and they will need some time in order to get this information because this is technically a fairly complicated Bill.

I would like to move the adjournment of debate at this time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Melfort has moved adjournment of debate.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — That is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 2 — The Power Corporation Amendment Act, 2004

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member responsible for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today I rise in this House to move second reading of The Power Corporation Act. The important legislative amendments being proposed help fulfill a commitment by our government in the Throne Speech, to ensure that our publicly owned utilities continue to play an important role in the quality of life in our province and in our economic development.

The amendments being proposed to The Power Corporation Act are needed so that SaskPower may respond to the ever-evolving electrical industry and at the same time not compromise its obligation to provide cost-effective and environmentally responsible power to the residents of Saskatchewan. These proposed amendments also help ensure that the hard work invested by past and present generations to build our Crown utilities is strengthened and nurtured in the years ahead.

The amendments to The Power Corporation Act, 1993 clarify SaskPower's current exclusive franchise to transmit and sell electricity in Saskatchewan by adding a definition of transmission and distribution to the Act. These changes are needed in order to help SaskPower and its customers better determine when a written waiver of this franchise is required from SaskPower. At the end of the day the biggest impact of the proposed changes will be to make it easier for customers who need SaskPower's approval to make common improvements to electrical systems on their own property.

The proposed changes to The Power Corporation Act being given a second reading today also highlight the effort made by SaskPower in providing extraordinary customer service. Whenever possible, steps are being taken to make transactions between all our utility Crowns and their customers as streamlined as possible.

The proposed amendments to this Power Corporation Act also clarify SaskPower's ability to ensure customers who interconnect into the corporation's system comply with its operating standards, particularly around safety issues.

These amendments will help SaskPower maintain the reliability and security of the provincial electrical system and will also ensure smooth operations continue with utilities adjoining Saskatchewan. Reliability and security of electrical supply is an issue of the highest priority after the wide-scale outage in eastern Canada last August. SaskPower is taking a proactive approach to do all that we can so that a similar outage does not hit our province.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, let me point out to all the members of this Assembly that the amendments being given second reading today highlight the pledge made by the government to respond to a call from the people of Saskatchewan. The electorate told us loud and clear to strengthen the Crowns and focus them not only on providing reliable and cost-effective service but also ensure that they are in the position to foster economic opportunities for this generation and those generations to come.

By undertaking prudent and timely amendments to guiding legislation for Crowns like SaskPower we are responding to this call. Under this government, the strong and positive relationship between Saskatchewan residents and our Crown corporations will continue into the new century. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the minister that Bill No. 2, The Power Corporation Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand at this Assembly today to speak to the second reading brought forward by the Minister Responsible for SaskPower in regards to The Power Corporation Act.

Mr. Speaker, we've just been through just a few months, short months ago, an election where this government basically promised the people of Saskatchewan, or at one time actually were telling the people of Saskatchewan they had the lowest utility rates in all of Canada. And when we find out with a closer look, as we take a closer look at the promise, that actually this government lags behind a number of jurisdictions when it comes to utility rates. But the government is trying to tell us since that time, that they will provide over a period of time a, I believe they now call it a basket of utility rates that will be in general lower in the province of Saskatchewan than in any other jurisdiction in Canada. And as we look at this piece of legislation, as the minister indicates today, whether or not this . . . the changes to The Power Corporation Act will enable the government to achieve those goals as time will certainly tell.

(15:00)

But it's quite apparent, Mr. Speaker, as we note in a most recent *Leader-Post* article, April 3, 2004, the headline reads, "Pay more for electricity?" And the article states that there is word that SaskPower is planning rate hikes. The minister responsible

states that:

... (they) may be looking at a request for a rate increase
... (some increases) sometime ... (into) the next few
months ...

And that, Mr. Speaker, would certainly sound like a broken promise that the government had and the Premier had just made to the people of Saskatchewan just a few short months ago when the Premier went on to tell everyone that he would make Saskatchewan the cheapest place to live and certainly give them the lowest basket of utility rates. And now we know already, Mr. Speaker, that certainly isn't true because we are also ... have already seen that Saskatchewan isn't the lowest in the country with the utility rates.

And one has to ask themselves, with the changes being brought forward in this piece of legislation, whether or not in the near or not too distant future we will indeed, the residents of Saskatchewan and the consumers of electricity in this province, we'll see indeed some of the lowest utility, if not the lowest utility rates, in the province of Saskatchewan.

When the Minister Responsible for SaskPower was asked about the promises ... And the member from Saskatoon Nutana says she didn't hear about that promise and that maybe within four years they'll try to do something. I think, Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Assembly heard the member from Saskatoon Nutana talking about that fact. On one hand, the electorate believed during the election that we were actually promised the lowest utility rates and then shortly after the tune or the message coming from this government was that no, well maybe we weren't quite as honest.

In fact I think, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance made a comment about the fact that elections were not the place to get into a debate on whether or not we have the lowest utility rates or whether or not the books are balanced or whether or not the finances are actually in place to address the issues of the day. And unfortunately maybe the member from Saskatoon Nutana should have taken a moment to talk to her colleague about utility rates and about the promises they made.

But as we look at the piece of legislation today and I listen to the minister's comments, and the minister talked in his opening remarks, made a comment about ensuring that our publicly owned utilities continue to play an important role in the quality of our life, of life in our province, and in our economic development.

Now if there's something that disturbs me, Mr. Speaker — and it should disturb every resident of the province of Saskatchewan — is that it appears quite clear that this government again has no vision for the growth or the ability of this province to grow, outside of its ability to utilize its own Crown corporations and ... because of the lack of investment opportunity and the unwillingness of investment dollars to look at coming to this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, when the minister talks about economic development, I think it's sad to say that if the only reliance and the ability this government has of building the province is continuing to look at our Crown corporations, then this

province is in for a long, dry ride and the people of Saskatchewan are going to continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's imperative that we look very carefully at our economic development. And the member from P.A. Northcote, I think, is offering some solid ... some suggestions about economic development. I'm looking forward to hearing what the member from P.A. Northcote has to add to this debate as we get into further discussion on the issue.

But when it comes to economic development, I believe, Mr. Speaker, this government in the Throne Speech talked about the great opportunities that we have in the province of Saskatchewan. And we all listened very carefully and very intently to that Throne Speech debate. And the government at that time in the Throne Speech as it was delivered by Her Honour, talked about growth of green power, building our green economy. It talked about the wealth of resources that we have in the province of Saskatchewan, the resources that we have such as potash, uranium — and some of the highest grade uranium anywhere in the world.

It talks ... the Throne Speech talked about natural gas. It talked about oil and other mining opportunities as we are beginning to see more and more potential development in the north; which is not only an economic benefit for the province's ... for all of us in Saskatchewan but certainly would be, I'm certain, an economic benefit for the First Nations community and many of whom live in northern Saskatchewan and today are benefiting from the ongoing exploration and mining development in our Far North.

But when we're talking about our economic development and opportunities for economic development, Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that this government has lost the ability to look beyond what it believes it can do on its own and what it believes the Crown corporations can do to provide economic development, rather than looking at beyond government's ability of ... and the responsibility of governments to provide clear legislative grounds, clear regulatory process, and create an economic environment which means more competition when it comes to taxes, when it comes to corporate taxes and business taxes in the province of Saskatchewan, which would allow private investment into this province to develop the resources that we have if we're going to see this province grow.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you are aware of and I am aware of and the members of this Assembly are aware of a group within this province who believes that 1 million people is not good enough in the province of Saskatchewan. In fact they have suggested that this province should be a province that has a population of potentially 2 million people. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a dream. And it's a dream and a goal that business people in this province have begun to think about, have begun to dream about, and are asking themselves and basically saying, now what would Saskatchewan be, what would this province be if we had 2 million people residing in the province of Saskatchewan rather than 1 million people? If we had 2 million people of which say 600,000 people rather than the 200,000 actually paying taxes today were actually paying taxes into our economy, what would it mean to each and every one of us as taxpayers in providing ... meeting the needs and providing the

services such as the health and education the government continues to talk about?

Mr. Speaker, if this province is going to grow, this government is going to have to realize sooner or later that they're going to have to look beyond just the few Crown corporations that we have and the four major Crowns, the utilities — power, energy, and telephone and SGI — and begin to realize that we've got to look beyond where we are today and begin to dream and believe in the future and open up doors and opportunities so this economic development can proceed.

Mr. Speaker, if we aren't prepared to dream, if we aren't prepared to build, if we aren't prepared to reach out to the community beyond us we will continue to be a province of a million people. And as we have seen in the past, as we continue to see today, and I suggest we will see into the future, we will continue to use the bright young minds that are studying in our colleges and universities, simply because of the lack of opportunities in the province of Saskatchewan.

And we have to ask ourselves, does this specific piece of legislation do anything to create an environment and job opportunities, and create growth within the province of Saskatchewan for our young people to look at investing in this province.

As I look at the piece of legislation and as I listen to the minister as well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister talked about this Act, The Power Corporation Act, 1993 clarifying SaskPower's current exclusive franchise to transmit and sell electricity in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, what we need to ask of the Minister is exactly what is implied by this . . . this line here talking about current exclusive franchise to transmit?

Is the minister suggesting — and as we get into committee later on — is the minister suggesting, Mr. Speaker, that SaskPower is going to be the only corporation that has the ability to transmit? Or is the minister beginning to recognize that there are other avenues whereby we need to look at our transmission system and utilize that transmission system.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the potential for men and women, households in this province, farmers in this province . . . And, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about that potential, I believe it's in the . . . I believe the Maritime provinces have opened up the doors for wind generation where individuals are purchasing their own wind generators and then are tying into the grid, and they're selling back.

And, Mr. Speaker, let me mention it to the Minister of Finance again, where was the government? The government a few years ago, talked about cogeneration, and they talked about GreenPower. And when we talk about cogeneration, what's wrong with individual families owning windmills and, Mr. Speaker, generating their own electricity. And then the additional that they can't consume, being able to put it into the transmission grid to meet the needs of the Saskatchewan residents, and the needs of Saskatchewan Power so that, as the Minister indicated in this speech, we will not have to face that blackout, that southern Ontario faced a couple of years ago.

Because of the fact that people in Saskatchewan with their

ingenuity, with their ability to put together . . . their ideas and, Mr. Speaker, with their willingness to invest in their province to help grow their province, we will take advantage of the opportunities that men and women across this province want to provide to the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we . . . when we talk about cogeneration, and we certainly have seen what wind power can do in the province of Saskatchewan through the investment in the Southwest, and I understand there are more wind generators going to be going up into that area. And of course we have mentioned that that is certainly a positive development because it addresses one of the major problems we face in the province of Saskatchewan when it comes to the Kyoto accord.

We all know that in Saskatchewan we generate power through the use of coal. And we know that the SaskPower, through its project down at Boundary dam, is doing everything that it can to improve its plant so that it's providing a power utility entity to the province of Saskatchewan in a more environmentally favourable process. But we look at wind power; we look at cogeneration projects.

And I understand now even in the agricultural sector, for example, hog operations, I understand that there's a process now where the people are looking at ways in which they can use the waste products from hog operations to actually generate power and provide power for their own operations, with the opportunity yet down the road of moving into providing the additional power that's generated to SaskPower.

And so, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things within this piece of legislation we want to see, we want to talk to . . . we want to ask the minister about. We would actually like to quiz officials about, in regards to the impact that this piece of legislation will have on the people of Saskatchewan, whether or not, Mr. Speaker, it's going to be a way of growing and enhancing not only SaskPower's ability to meet the needs of its customers, but enhancing growth and opportunity in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the minister made a comment as well today; he talked about changes to the Act being given a second reading today, highlighting the effort made by SaskPower in providing extraordinary customer service. And, Mr. Speaker, I think we all will acknowledge over the past while that SaskPower through the past number of years has certainly made a great effort in meeting the needs of its customers when it comes to power transmission, and when it comes to the problems related to storms and severe weather conditions, power outages. And on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, customers have not been affected dramatically for a fairly long period of time because of the ability of the power corporation and its . . . and the men and women who work for the corporation to get out and address the needs and to make sure they get the service back on line so that customers have it available.

(15:15)

So the minister is quite right that SaskPower has to continue to look at how it can provide extraordinary customer service to its customers.

Mr. Speaker, it's imperative that the people of Saskatchewan have a firm understanding of the ability of Crown corporations not only to meet the demands of the customers but as well to see what the Crown corporations can do to continue to meet the desire for the lowest possible utility rates in the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to ask ourselves, will the changes to this legislation enable SaskPower to actually meet its goals and objectives of continuing to provide low-cost utility rates to the people of Saskatchewan? Will this piece of legislation open up the door to Saskatchewan residents who would like to invest in other forms of power generation, even for their own personal and private use, with the ability of selling excess power into the grid so that SaskPower can continue to meet the demands of its customers across the province, whether it's industrial customers, whether it's commercial customers, whether it's farm or private business and private individuals, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, it's imperative that we continue to . . . that SaskPower continue to provide reliable and secure electrical supply to the people of Saskatchewan. And when we talk about providing reliable and secure electrical supply, the minister also talked about . . . provide through the reliable and security of a provincial electrical system, also ensuring smooth operations continue within Saskatchewan . . . with the Saskatchewan utilities.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's quite apparent to us that this government so far is looking at continuing to look at the Crowns as being their economic saviour rather than looking beyond the Crown corporations and looking at other avenues and other opportunities for investment in this province and ways of building this province.

And I'm hoping that the minister . . . And I realize the current Minister Responsible for SaskPower is a new member in this Assembly. And we're looking forward to what the minister is bringing to the table, as there's no doubt that the new minister responsible has come and asked the electorate to give him the opportunity to be their voice. And there's no doubt in my mind that this member is bringing some new ideas to this Assembly — or we hope he's bringing some new ideas to this Assembly — whereby we can look beyond where we were today and find out how we can build, and build a more prosperous economy in the province of Saskatchewan.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, this Premier promised the people of Saskatchewan the lowest utility rates. We have yet . . . are waiting to see whether this government can deliver on its promises, whether or not the amendments to The Power Corporation Act allow the government to achieve its campaign goal. We will wait and see; time will tell.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's imperative that we look very closely at this piece of legislation. We have asked a number of stakeholders to respond, give us some ideas of how the legislation will impact them, and whether there are some amendments or changes that we need to bring forward. And we look forward to hearing from these stakeholders and addressing their needs and concerns as we move further in the debate.

At this time I move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Moosomin that debate on second reading of Bill 2, The Power Corporation Amendment Act be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3 — The Certified Management Consultants Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 2, An Act to amend The Certified Management Consultants Act.

The original Act was assented to on May 12, 1998 but has not yet been proclaimed. Proclamation will occur when regulatory bylaws have been completed by the Saskatchewan Institute of Certified Management Consultants and approved by the minister responsible.

The institute has requested several amendments to the original Act. One of the amendments will allow the institute to set criteria for prospective members through bylaws rather than legislation. The institute's request for this amendment arose from a situation concerning qualifying experience for prospective members. The existing legislation would exclude individuals with internal consulting experience from being prospective members of the institute. All other jurisdictions in Canada recognize both external and internal consulting experience. The amendment will address this specific issue and make it simpler for the institute to make changes in the future. This way the institute will be better able to stay in step with other Canadian jurisdictions.

Also several amendments will authorize the institute to grant certificates to those who meet the educational, experience, and other qualifications required to become a member. These amendments are purely administrative and consistent with current professional practices.

Finally, a housekeeping amendment will correct a discrepancy in a current Act. The Act incorrectly refers to the Institute of Certified Management Accountants of Saskatchewan Inc. The correct name specified in the amendment is the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Saskatchewan Inc.

These amendments will be effective the day on which The Certified Management Consultants Act comes into force. This happens through a proclamation after the institute files regulatory bylaws which have been approved by the minister responsible.

Mr. Speaker, we are fine-tuning the Act, providing the institute with a little more authority, and making it easier to keep up with changes in the profession. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Certified Management Consultants Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 3, The Certified Management Consultants Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and offer some comments on the proposed amendment to The Certified Management Consultants Act as outlined today by the minister.

Mr. Speaker, I think that fundamentally there is . . . got to be stated on the record that the official opposition and the government, I think, are in agreement that it is important for professional organizations to, as much as possible, be in a position to self-regulate their profession, to have the flexibility and the tools that they need in order to make sure that their profession attains and maintains the highest standards of competence and ability that's possible.

And, Mr. Speaker, insofar as these amendments to this legislation allow that to happen, the official opposition supports that very much in principle.

Mr. Speaker, it's also important to note that the Act that is currently in place that would provide this framework has not been proclaimed because of some difficulties with the Act, and this amendment is going to clarify that. And I hope that it's not going to end up sitting for an inappropriate length of time before it's being proclaimed as the institute works with the Department of Finance and the government to make sure that all of the needed changes are made so that the Act can be proclaimed and the organization, the certified management consultants, can then exercise their full authority and responsibility for the profession that's so important to this province.

Mr. Speaker, many of these professional organizations like the certified management consultants are people that are very fundamental to help us understand all of, number one, our own financial situations because they are professionals that work in the private sector and help us to understand our responsibilities to our books and to our financial obligations. But they also help us to understand the affairs of government and they provide needed consultations to individuals in regard to relationships with government, and they provide a very high standard of professionalism to allow these kinds of activities to continue.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we not only look in isolation in our own province about how we're providing the legislative framework for these professional organizations to self-regulate, we have to keep our eye on not only the province's situation but the national/international situation. Because very often when it comes to looking at this kind of information and these professionals who deal in the financial world, by and large, have the kinds of standards and tools that they need in order to not only compete within the province but to compete on a national and, indeed, an international basis.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have learned that many of these

professional associations from time to time come into challenges that really question the tools that they have at their disposal, and that they need to have changes made in order to equip themselves with unforeseen circumstances and challenges that arise.

And I can think of, in the accounting field for example, Mr. Speaker, when the whole Enron scandal hit in the United States, I think that had a profound effect on chartered accountants, for example. And they needed to look at the way their processes and procedures were operating and how they were warranting that information that was received and scrutinized was indeed accurate, complete, and appropriate.

And I think the same kind of thing exists for any of these professional associations. And certainly the certified management accountants need the tools that they require in order to make the adjustments and changes to their legislation in order to make sure they meet the challenges of a very complex and very challenging world. And so, Mr. Speaker, insofar as this legislation accomplishes that, I think it's a very worthwhile process.

Mr. Speaker, the minister also outlined that there are some technical changes. And I think his words were of a primarily housekeeping basis, and we understand that. And we certainly think that it is important to grab this maximum flexibility for these professional management consultants.

For example, we think that it probably is entirely appropriate that they should be able to set the criteria for their membership in their own bylaws rather than having to amend legislation, which is and can be a very cumbersome kind of a process. And it's difficult to have any of these professional organizations to come to the government every time they want to make some pretty routine changes to the way their organization works. And if they can do this by their own professional association bylaws, that that makes an awful lot more sense for them to have the flexibility to make sure they can respond to the challenges that I've outlined in my remarks just a few moments ago.

I think it's important that they receive the requirement in order to make sure that the standards for admission to their profession are held and adjusted to an appropriate level. Mr. Speaker, it's important that people have confidence and faith in these professions so that they know when they are able to call themselves and designate that they're indeed a certified managerial consultant, that that has some high standards of competency and knowledge and training because if that is eroded in any way, the public's confidence in these professions is also eroded. And that isn't good for government or for the province or for the ability of these organizations to provide the kind of professional services that they need.

Mr. Speaker, the minister also said that these amendments are going to be consistent with current practice, and I think that that is important. But I also hope and trust that while it adjusts things to current practice, it also creates appropriate flexibility so that these organizations have the ability to make changes and adjust to unforeseen circumstances that may come upon them and so that the current practice today may be different tomorrow and the next day as the world evolves.

And certainly I think, because of the scandals in the financial world, that these changes are going to be ongoing. And they're going to have a significant impact on the way and the standards that people that offer professional accounting advice provide that advice and the levels of competency that are needed to have that happen.

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of other minute kind of changes in this proposed legislation. It certainly is appropriate that if there was an inappropriate name for this organization in the previous legislation, that that be corrected. And so instead of it saying that it's the Institute of Certified Management Accountants of Saskatchewan, that it is — as the institute has requested — the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Saskatchewan Inc. And I think all of those technical things are important to consult with these professionals in order to make sure that these changes are appropriate.

(15:30)

Mr. Speaker, we certainly accept the minister's explanation in terms of this legislation. We certainly have a responsibility not only to listen to the minister's explanation, to use our very best judgment and facilitate our people to look at the details and the amendments of this legislation.

I think it's also important as the official opposition that we consult with the professionals that are affected. And so we will want to be consulting with the certified management consultants in Saskatchewan to see if not only does this address their concerns but does it fully address their concerns, or potentially are there some other details that have been inadvertently admitted or overlooked, so that we can perhaps have the opportunity to suggest constructive amendments if there are any of these outstanding issues that have been neglected.

And so in order to facilitate and have time for that to happen, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Melfort that debate on Bill No. 3, second reading, The Certified Management Consultants Amendment Act be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 4 — The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2004. The proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker, will streamline and enhance administration of the pension plan, provide members receiving lump sum payments from the plan with more flexibility, and ensure that part-time and full-time employees are treated equitably with respect to

credit for time worked.

Mr. Speaker, one of the amendments deals with members eligible for retirement who choose to transfer the value of their pensions out of the plan. Sometimes the amount they wish to transfer out exceeds the maximum amount allowable by the federal Income Tax Act. The amendment will give them the opportunity to use that excess maximum amount to purchase from the plan a pension benefit that terminates at age 64 or within 15 years. This change, Mr. Speaker, provides members with additional flexibility to manage their pension funds.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, a spousal beneficiary can purchase an annuity from the Municipal Employees' Pension Plan. To simplify administration of the pension plan and to maintain its integrity as a defined benefit pension plan, we want to eliminate that option. This will not change the amount payable to surviving spouses. They will continue to be able to transfer the value of the pension to an improved retirement benefit such as a R-R-I-F, RRIF (Registered Retirement Income Funds), or annuity, or to purchase an annuity from the private market.

The amendments also address equity, Mr. Speaker. Part-time employees should be able to earn and be credited for eligible time worked during the academic year just as full-time employees can. There's no reason not to treat part-time and full-time employees equally.

Mr. Speaker, some amendments are administrative housekeeping measures, for example updating the names of Acts within the Act, removing outdated references, repealing definition no longer used by the plan, and removing gender references.

Mr. Speaker, I hereby move second reading of The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 4, The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Martensville.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dealing with Bill No. 4, as the minister just finished telling us, there's some housekeeping things in there which obviously aren't of a great issue. But on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, we're dealing with pensions and that is a critical issue. And I imagine that all those people who are watching on TV and seeing me speak would understand why I'm concerned about pensions. And a number of people on the other side should be in a similar situation.

But there are numerous things in here that I do want to go ahead and address and refer to before we go through this.

There are, as was mentioned, a definite change, Mr. Speaker, in how people view pensions. There was a time when no one paid much attention to them. They basically thought, well there's a pension in place and I'll get what I get and that's it. And I think things have changed a whole lot in that particular area, Mr. Speaker, because in the present consideration of pensions, people are very concerned about how much pension's going to be there, how it's being handled, and how they will be able to

handle their own pensions when they start collecting those pensions. We see from time to time that pension funds don't have the right amount in them. And this happens both in private and in public situations, Mr. Speaker, because in the private situation we from time to time find that their companies haven't put an adequate amount of money aside for it. I think the worst example of that, Mr. Speaker, lies with this particular NDP government. Because it's this government that for decades — decades, Mr. Speaker — put absolutely no money in the teachers' pension fund, to use just one specific example.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that's why we need to look at Bill No. 4 so closely. Because we need to assess whether this government's doing the same thing to municipal employees that in past they've done to the other employees that basically were paid out of taxpayers' dollars. And that was a situation, Mr. Speaker, where, as I said, for decades you had, you had teachers being told, being told by this particular government that don't worry, trust us; don't worry, be happy, because we'll take care of it all. Then we find all of a sudden that this money . . . this government as we've seen in the last little while has run deficits and run itself into debt for three, four years in a row. And I could see some of those people who under that old . . . are under that old plan, Mr. Speaker, very concerned about, will there all of a sudden be a default on their pensions, because there isn't any money that's been squirreled away by this government?

In the '80s there was an effort to put it back in. In the '90s, when the NDP took over, they took that old pension fund and stopped putting money into it again. And so those particular teachers are in the plan that basically has now been labelled the unfunded liability part of our budget system. And it means that government, as I said earlier on, has said, don't worry, be happy, we'll pay for it; we don't know where we'll get the money from; there isn't a penny put away for it; but we'll just try and find it someplace and hand out the pensions. And that's why this is so critical that we look at any change that this government does to a particular pension plan.

I want to address part of it — this is Bill No. 4, Mr. Speaker, section 20. And it's section 20(2)(8). And there's a little part there that I want to read, and then we'll go over the next page and discuss a number of specific points on that:

If the amount that a member transfers pursuant to . . . section (5) exceeds the amount that the member is permitted to transfer pursuant to section 147.3 . . . of the *Income Tax Act* . . .

And that's what the minister referred to.

Now those situations, Mr. Speaker, the individual has a number of options. They can have that amount that's in excess paid to the member or there is some reference to what happens at age 65 and what happens 15 years after the date of that particular transfer.

So we're getting into a situation, Mr. Speaker, where some of the monies that traditionally, traditionally were just kind of ignored by the public, the public is now very concerned what's happening with their pension. And so to that extent it's good that we're looking at these kinds of issues. The question then comes up again — as I said earlier, and I'll be taking a global

look at this, Mr. Speaker — how trustworthy this really is. And we have to look at the whole issue to draw that particular conclusion to know whether we need to be very concerned about what's happening here or whether we don't.

And the member opposite, the minister who just talking about Air Canada, we could go on for a long time with Air Canada when you have companies that run into those sorts of financial trouble, Mr. Speaker. And I would hope that in further debate the minister would expand on his view on Air Canada. It is one of those companies that over the years has had a lot of public money put into it — the kind of thing that the NDP really enjoys to do. And they're in grief.

And yet we look at some of the other privately run aircraft companies and they're just doing quite fine, thank you very much. And it kind of shows, as I'm glad that the minister brought this up, it shows very, it shows very definitely that any time that you have public monies put into business, you need to pay very close attention to how well it's going to be run. And I think the example that the minister just brought forward indicates the reason for our concern.

But as I said, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to deal with some of the issues that are closer to this Bill and not ramble afield as the minister is prone to do.

Mr. Speaker, this one deals specifically with Municipal Employees' Pension Act. Well pensions are obviously a part of the cost of doing business. They are that for a private company, they are that for a public situation where the pensions need to be set aside. And any time that anything that's in the public does its financial planning, they have to sort of say, well how much of this is going to be applied to our pension programs.

Now that's when we need to look at what is the financial situation of the municipalities throughout our province?

Well, Mr. Speaker, since the very early '90s the municipal bodies of this particular province have been totally gutted by the NDP. And yet in spite of that gutting they've been required to — and that's all right — they've been required to and they've done it, taken good care of their pensions. And it's put extreme stress on those municipal bodies, the people who are elected to it, and the people who are funding it, which at one time, Mr. Speaker, was to a substantial extent, the provincial NDP government.

But as I said, in the early '90s they backed away from that. They off-loaded and basically said to the municipal bodies, you're now in charge but you have to maintain all of the services that you had before, you have to maintain all the kinds of things as they were before we backed out on you, you have to now find your own monies. This, Mr. Speaker, created a great burden on the taxpayers.

And as this is Bill No. 4, The Municipal Employees' Pension Act, the off-loading that's taken place has resulted in a whole lot higher taxes both on the education side of property and on the property side of property taxes. And I think for that this government, NDP government, needs to take a lot of responsibility because at that point maintaining the funding for programs such as the pension plan become much more difficult

for the municipal bodies to maintain.

And they'd hoped throughout this past election, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, that there would be a change in that. The Premier, Mr. Speaker, went around the province I believe and made numerous statements about taxation and how things were going to be a whole lot better for the people in this province. One of the key things . . . and I think this is just a short little item, but we need to just highlight this because it indicates what we were told and what actually happened. And we'll take one that's really short.

One of the commitments happened to be — and we're talking about municipal employees and we'll move just for a second over here to students — there was supposed to be a \$1,000 provincial income tax rebate for all post-secondary graduates. Oh, but that got cancelled, that got cancelled. That's just an indication of how, as we go through the various aspects of the election, one thing after another got cancelled, one promise after another hasn't been kept and reneged on or been pushed off until who knows when. Generally, well we might be doing this after the end of our four-year term.

(15:45)

Well, Mr. Speaker, we saw the turmoil this government was in at the last day that we sat last week. And there was a motion that came forward and that was voted on. And the government side lost that, Mr. Speaker, because they were tied in the number of seats and the vote had to be broken, and there's a democratic process for that. And they sat there literally with . . . slack-jawed and in amazement as to what in the world has happened here — all four wheels came off the wagon at the same time.

And it's that government that doesn't have any understanding of how this place operates. It doesn't have any understanding of maintaining their promises. And we have the member from North Battleford who's just chirping from his seat. The member should very well know that when I just a minute ago talked about some of the Premier's promises, one of those promises, Mr. Speaker, was we're not going to be changing taxation. One per cent increase in the PST, Mr. . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I am awaiting eagerly for the member to relate his comments to Bill No. 4, The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal bodies, as I mentioned, that have to fund this have to find their monies from various different sources. And one of the things that those municipal bodies, Mr. Speaker, are going to have to be concerned about is the fact that they also have to pay the various taxes on the new things they buy.

And I recall well that, as I said, the member that I referred to earlier on got up in his maiden speech and said something about that particular tax wasn't at all onerous in North Battleford. Well I think there must have been a power outage at that particular time in North Battleford. That's why he's prepared to say that, knowing that the people back home wouldn't have been overly impressed with that.

The reference that I made to section 20, Mr. Speaker, the following one . . . that was number (8) I referred to. If we go on to number (9), it says:

No allowance shall be paid pursuant to clause (8)(b) if the amount of the allowance would be less than \$100 per month.

Now what isn't stated in here — and this is why we're going to have to spend a lot of time on this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, not just in a global discussion but in a specific discussion — that doesn't say do you then take that amount, be it \$75, is it then just goes into that big black hole called the government General Revenue Fund, or is it topped up to 100 and goes to the individual as a \$100 payment? It just said no allowance shall be paid if it's less than 100. So is the government taking all that money to itself?

That would be critical, Mr. Speaker, not because people will necessarily go hungry if they don't get the \$75, but it speaks to the integrity of this government that they would actually take a certain amount of money owing to people on pensions and not pay that.

Let me read that again, Mr. Speaker. We need to be very careful of this:

No allowance shall be paid pursuant to clause (8)(b) if the amount of the allowance would be less than \$100 per month.

And I suspect, Mr. Speaker, I suspect very strongly that the NDP will garner all of those amounts unto itself. How . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And we have the member from Moose Jaw saying municipal pensions. Definitely, Bill No. 4, I just read directly from it, saying very specifically that if it's less than \$100 per month, this NDP government is not going to pay it. They're going to take it. It matters not . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Why is the member from Regina Qu'Appelle on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, asking leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Qu'Appelle has requested leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave is granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to the House today a person who is in the west gallery, Mr. George Grassick. George is a farmer, was a member of an RM council, is currently working in my office. He's got a lot of experience in the community. He's also an actor, taking part in some movies that have been filmed in Saskatchewan. A wide range of careers and experience and I think contributing very, very well to the work of the office of the Minister of Agriculture.

So we're glad to have him here today taking in some of the session. I'd ask all members to welcome George to this legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Debate resumes on second reading of Bill No. 4. I recognize the member from Martensville.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 4 — The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2004 (continued)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to underline that last little part again. This government would take out of the hands of pensioners money that is due them, money that is due them — item number (9) — that's a shame.

It's not as I've said the fact that these people are necessarily going to go hungry because of that; but just the thought that any government would take pension money away and not pay it when it's due.

The next section, Mr. Speaker, section (10), goes on to discuss what happens if a member dies, and what happens to that pension amount, and how that relates to the spouse. And I'm going to have to again discuss, a little bit to some extent, what has happened in the past with some of the pension plans that this NDP government's been responsible for.

If, Mr. Speaker, in a situation a spouse passes on and they own a house, unless there's been some other agreement, the remaining spouse gets the house. That's an accidental rhyme but it should be there to sort of click your attention. The remaining spouse gets the house. And I think the NDP over there need to remember that, because it's kind of a thought process and something that people sort of cherish to say, well, if the spouse dies, everything that's there I can now use to maintain my welfare for the remaining years that I have.

Now what happens in pensions? Well let's take that same pension plan that I referred to earlier, Mr. Speaker, where if a spouse dies . . . This is that unfunded pension plan I talked about a little earlier on. If a spouse dies, the remaining spouse gets only 60 per cent of that. Only 60 per cent.

Now that seems downright fraudulent, because here you have an individual who has worked for whatever period of time that needed to be, and in a lot of those pensions you get 2 per cent of your, you know, of your pension plan or your best five year . . . average your best five years as a pension amount. So you get that amount. So if you've worked 30 years you would get 60 per cent, if you worked 35 years you would get 70 per cent — whatever. So you would think that that whole amount was there just as the whole house is there, the whole quarter of land is there, the whole car is there.

But not with an NDP pension plan. With an NDP pension plan they say, sorry, but we're just going to pay you 60 per cent of that. And I ask why? I ask later on in this debate for any NDP person to stand up in their place and tell us why, when someone

has worked their whole life, they would decide they could take 40 per cent of that pension and just say, we're not going to pay it out.

And where does that money stay? It stays in the government coffers. Oh I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I made a mistake there. The government . . . The money doesn't really stay in government coffers because none of it was ever put aside by the NDP. Not one cent was put aside. It was that . . . trust us.

Well we've seen from the last election how much trust is worth. And I would suggest to those people who are on some of those pension plans, they need to be somewhat concerned. I don't want to go ahead and create a whole lot of fear throughout the retired people in this province, but looking at how this government has handled finances and how they've kept their promise, that promise of trust us doesn't hold a whole lot of weight, doesn't hold a whole lot of water, Mr. Speaker.

Now that leaves you, Mr. Speaker, if you have the situation where someone has worked 30 years and they basically then get 60 per cent of the average of their best five years as a pension and then they pass away, the surviving spouse gets 60 per cent of that, which is just a little over half. So that's a bit more than 30 per cent. So you're left between 35 to 40 per cent. So now you have a surviving spouse left with 35 to 40 per cent of what that family used to take in when there was earnings taking place.

And they say they have a social conscience, Mr. Speaker. And the NDP is going to say they have a social conscience and they're going to turn that spouse out on the street and say, you've only got 35 to 40 per cent of what you used to get in from that particular wage earner — that's what you have to live on now. And we throw into the mix that this is a particular government that's de-indexed various drugs, added all sorts of costs to things, keeping in mind also, Mr. Speaker, what we've had with . . . what was supposed to be another broken promise, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier told all the people in this province, we're going to give you the lowest basket of utility rates in Canada. Wrong. The people in this province never have, and under this government never will have, the lowest basket of utility rates in Canada.

An Hon. Member: — Not using my math.

Mr. Heppner: — And somebody out there from North Battleford chirped — and I'll have to respond to this, Mr. Speaker — said not using my math.

Well I'll tell you how that was arrived at, Mr. Speaker, and I think we need to do that at this particular point. It was taking a capital city of the Western provinces, taking a person of the same age, driving identical cars, and all of those situations, and then work that through. Well the capital cities are generally the larger cities in the province — with the exception of Saskatchewan — generally the larger cities in the province, so that's a good place to take your polling from. So we took that kind of a sample.

We could have taken it from Fox Valley and said, well what

does that cost? We could have taken it from North Battleford where half the people have to drive down to Lloyd to buy a lot of their furniture. And the member from North Battleford sits there and grins. He should go talk to some of his furniture salesmen in North Battleford and find out how happy they are about this one per cent tax. But, Mr. Speaker, I wander. Mr. Speaker, I wander. I'll have to get back to this particular Bill.

Mr. Speaker, there's a large section here referring to beneficiaries, and I think that's important. We also have to look at how this is going to affect not only municipal bodies . . . and I've spent some time discussing this, Mr. Speaker, with the way they've had downloading taking place on them and how they've had to find the money elsewhere dealing with the Bill. This will also affect, Mr. Speaker, the schools in the area who now have to get a lot of their tax money from those very same sources. Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated there has been abundant lack of tax relief and that, that's been serious.

The other thing we need to mention, Mr. Speaker, just to put this all into context, is that this is also the same government, Mr. Speaker, that has spent no end of time decrying the fact that the federal government has offloaded onto the province. And there's some truth in that. It's happened in health. There was an equalization glitch that's now been straightened out, Mr. Speaker, but it gives them some idea of what the municipal bodies have been going through.

There is much in this particular Bill, as I said, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to have to deal with because we are dealing with pensions. And I think when you deal with those individuals, the pensioners of our province, we have to be very careful the kind of legislation we pass. It is those people, Mr. Speaker, that have created this province. It is those people that are still left here paying taxes in this province.

Unfortunately their children are gone, not paying taxes in Saskatchewan. Their grandchildren are gone, filling up schools elsewhere, while this government plans to have thousands of children less in schools in the next couple of years. And that's what they're planning for; their own educational document says that. Those people are all gone, leaving only the very young and the very old, Mr. Speaker.

So this Bill addresses a much larger percentage, a disproportionate percentage, of individuals in this province than it would in any other province in Canada. And that's why this Bill is probably more critical and needs more . . . a better analysis in this province of Saskatchewan than in any other province because it affects a larger percentage of the people of this province. We're going to need to talk to the people who are on pensions, people who are interested in their pension plans, to find out what other reactions there are to that, as well as to the people, the municipal bodies themselves, and how this will affect that.

So to that end, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a lot more work to do on this particular Bill. I look forward to debating it, possibly in other venues, and maybe here in the House again as well. So at this point I move that we adjourn debate on Bill No. 4.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:00)

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Martensville that debate on second reading of Bill No. 4, The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2004 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 5 — The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund Amendment Act, 2004. The purpose of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is to create a separate board of directors for The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund. The board responsible for SPAF (Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund) manages the investments of the annuity fund. It also pays annuities to pensioners who have chosen an annuity to receive their pension income. These pensioners are former members of the Public Employees Pension Plan and the MLA superannuation plan.

Since its inception, Mr. Speaker, the same pension board responsible for the Public Employees Pension Plan has also been responsible for managing the money in the Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund. It is important to note that, if the fund's liabilities exceed its assets, the difference must be made up out of the provincial government's General Revenue Fund. In other word, the Act dictates that the deficit must be reimbursed out of the public purse.

The annuity fund is totally funded by the members. Each year projected liabilities for annuity payments are compared to the assets. The purpose is to determine if the fund will have sufficient money to pay the benefits as promised. Currently the fund is in a surplus position.

As of December 31, 2003, The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund had 1,836 members receiving monthly payments of \$886,000. At the end of the fiscal year 2002-2003, the fund had assets of \$117.34 million and liabilities of \$117.19 million. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we want to establish a separate and unique board to monitor the performance of the investments in the fund to protect the interests of both fund members and the general public.

Mr. Speaker, I hereby move second reading of The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund Amendment Act, 2004.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 5, The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Why is the . . . Could we just go through this? Before we

proceed, why is the member from Meadow Lake on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The member from Meadow Lake has requested leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and also thank you to the opposition for granting leave.

I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of the Assembly, some special friends who've just joined us in the gallery, Mr. Speaker. First of all, on the far left is a friend I should say and also mayor of my hometown, Goodsoil, Jack Purves who is down here bringing some exchange students down as well, so he's here in several capacities. On the far right is his wife, Rita. And thank you very much for coming.

Seated with them also, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues is Jack's sister, Penny, and Penny's daughter, Lisa — give a little wave, Lisa — Fay, from here in Regina; and the exchange students from South Korea. And I want to thank Jack very much for bringing them here. I've just finished sort of a very quick race around the building showing them a few places in the building. Joining us today is Jin-Young Mun— Jin, just a little wave — there you go, and also Yu-Na Lee from South Korea as I've indicated.

So I'd ask all members to please join me in welcoming them here to our legislature here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Debate resumes on Bill No. 5, second reading. I recognize the member from Moosomin.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 5 — The Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund Amendment Act, 2004 (continued)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I certainly on behalf of the official opposition welcome our guests from South Korea to our Assembly today. And I'm certain that they'll find that contrary to what they may have seen in their own parliament at sometimes, this is fairly quiet and contained here in the province of Saskatchewan. We certainly invite you and welcome you to our province, and we trust you've been enjoying your visit to not only our capital city, our Legislative Building, our province as well.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at this amendment today to the

Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund, again as my colleague before me was mentioning, there are a number of issues that we need to look at very carefully. And there's no doubt that as people go through life and as you put in so many years on the job, whether . . . regardless of what your job is, each and every one of us would hope that at one day we're going to continue to enjoy good health. And as we look forward to retirement, we're going to have funds available in our pension plan to meet our needs and give us the ability to enjoy some well-deserved years in retirement, just enjoying some of the things that we have always dreamt about doing. For some people, it might be getting out on the golf course a little more often than they have in the past, or for others it might be visiting other countries of the world and looking at . . . just observing how other people enjoy life and the challenges that they face in their life, or just getting away by ourselves to enjoy life for a bit.

And my colleagues and the members of this Assembly, I think we will all agree that public life — whether it's here in the province of Saskatchewan or in Canada or anyplace — we all find that there are many times that you get involved in public life. You make the choice and the commitment to serve your constituents, but at the same time you try to balance between your responsibilities to your family. And I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, I think we have all been faced with the challenge of finding that correct balance.

And as a result of trying to meet the demands of our constituents and also balancing time with our families, there have been times when we have had to forgo opportunities, maybe to some special events or that special holiday you would like to take with family. So I think we all, as we sit here in this Assembly or whether you are at a local level of government, Mr. Speaker, you all dream about the day when you will actually be able to sit back, retire, and actually do some of the things that you wanted to do — maybe get out to that favourite fishing hole a little more often.

Mr. Speaker, the only way that each and every one of us are going to be able to enjoy those opportunities is if there is . . . we are assured, ensured that we have adequate pension or funds in our pension plan to give us the ability to retire with dignity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I talk about the Saskatchewan pension plan annuity amendment Act, and we talk about . . . We're reminded of the defined pension fund and the minister alluded to that earlier. While we're talking about pension plans that actually are publicly funded pension plans that include members who are public employees, which is MLAs as well, although as the minister alluded to, we are . . . the MLAs currently now are on the annuity plan which is . . . certainly the board of directors has been doing actually a pretty amazing job at ensuring a return on our investment and . . . versus what we have seen in the past.

And, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to, when it comes to retiring, we want to, we want to know that the funds that we have been setting aside as individuals for that retirement are actually working on our behalf. And it's imperative that you have a very good board of directors managing those funds, especially in these days when we see such a change in how pension funds and investment opportunities, how quickly they can turn around. And if you don't have a board of directors that is

watching very closely and managing very closely, you will find that these pension plans could . . . they find themselves actually losing ground fairly quickly.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, we're all aware of that. We've seen what happened just two years . . . a little over a year ago now — I guess a year and a half ago now — as the markets collapsed. And for many people what . . . and especially people in the private sector as they were investing and taking lots of hard-earned dollars looking to build a solid pension plan only to watch it evaporate just overnight, which reminds us again that we need to have . . . we need to be very careful and frugal in how we manage.

And of course when you talk about the Saskatchewan Pension Plan Annuity Fund, Mr. Speaker, what we have done as individual members contributing to this plan, is we are putting our trust in some board members that we hope are watching the funds very carefully, investing wisely, in order that when we retire there will be some actual dollars available to each and every one of us for our retirement and not just . . . when I use the word us, Mr. Speaker, but I'm talking about all public employees in the province of Saskatchewan. We all feel that way.

However, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about public pension plans, we're quite well aware of the defined benefit plan. And my colleague earlier was speaking a bit about pension plans and talked about the teachers' pension plan. And, Mr. Speaker, you might be quite well aware of that one in your background. However we won't get into a debate with the Speaker and his involvement in the debate.

But, Mr. Speaker, anyone who's a teacher and on the defined pension benefit plan understands the problems that have been faced in the past and we're also . . . I believe people are becoming quite, very well aware that since 1991, since Roy Romanow and the NDP government was elected in this . . . to be the government of this province, the defined pension plan or the unfunded pension liability that we talk of so often, has gone up by more than one point, I believe it's about one or \$1.2 billion in additional unfunded liability to the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance is right. The defined pension liability is a liability. And what it means is down the road somebody is going to have to be responsible to cover that liability. And for years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the auditor has continued to point out the fact that we must be mindful of this liability and you can't sneeze at — I believe it's in that \$4 billion range now— you can't sneeze at that unfunded liability and say well that's just a few dollars and when we have to down the road, we'll dig into the general revenue pool and we'll cover those pension . . . that pension liability. So that the employees who are drawing on that pension fund actually have funds with which they can live on and indeed give them the opportunity to live a quality of life.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government moved to a pension annuity plan because of the fact that they began to realize that they could not continue to allow the unfunded liability to grow as massively as they have with the dollars that are currently there. So it's important for us to note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that

as I was talking earlier, it's important that we have good, solid financial managers and planners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I talk about good investments, good planners, good managers, I think each one of us as MLAs in this Assembly are endeavouring to do the best we can to be spokespersons and to speak and to stand up for the rights and the needs of our constituents. And this board that the minister is talking about, I believe as well it will be their intention, as it has for board members in the past, to do whatever is possible on their behalf to indeed meet the goals and objectives of administering this annuity pension plan that has been placed in their trust.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's imperative that they monitor it very carefully. And I trust, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the appointment of these members and the establishment of this new board, that this government looks for people with sound business sense and responsibility. This . . . and the reason I say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is I'm concerned that the way this government has been managing our fiscal state over the last few years, and especially the last four years and the \$2 billion we've basically seen growing in the public debt, my concern is based on their abilities over the last few years that I don't want to see the annuity plan going in the same direction. So we would certainly want to see that the government gives very careful thought, seeks some very good, sound advice in who they would appoint to be on this board of directors due to the fact that it's quite a responsibility that they would be . . . that they are carrying on behalf of the publicly funded pension plans in the province of Saskatchewan.

(16:15)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about changing a piece of legislation — and it's important for us as well as an opposition to take the time to look at what exactly the government is doing when it talks about changing the legislation — we want to make sure that those changes are a benefit . . . do not create . . . rather than creating a negative and having a negative impact on the people of Saskatchewan. And certainly in this case on the individuals who've been paying into a pension plan that they understood would work on their behalf that would actually grow on their behalf as administered by this board of directors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about pension funds and today certainly the people that are relying on pension plans today, we're talking about individuals who have reached a point in their lives of most, in many cases . . . although we find today people that are in their mid- to late-40s, early 50s, and reaching a point where they can retire quite comfortably because they've built up a pretty good pension plan for themselves.

However, Mr. Speaker, the people that are drawing on pension plans today and in the near future are individuals who are much older in life. And as you get older in life and as you begin to realize the complications you may face, as you begin to realize that health conditions you may face — and not everyone is fortunate to be blessed with a long, healthy life — many people find themselves as they get older facing some very difficult challenges in their lives as a result of health conditions.

So I've said that to say this. The senior population who are

living on pension plans today are trusting that those pension plans will not fail them. Those of us who are working today, looking forward to retirement in the not too distant future, are trusting that this board of directors will manage our pension plan so that it ensures that there are sufficient funds available in that pension plan to us as we retire, as we begin to look at opportunities for us in the future — whether it's, whether it's maybe doing some travelling or just meeting with family or getting out on that golf course or doing a bit of hunting and fishing. Whatever it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want the assurance — and there isn't an individual today, a senior today that doesn't want to know — that their pension plan will actually be there when they need it. And that's why it's very imperative that we have a solid group of individuals, a sound group of individuals with some good fiscal background who will manage this pension plan appropriately.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I talk about seniors and we look at this budget and we ask ourselves what is this budget really doing for seniors in the province of Saskatchewan — and I'm sure as I over, even over this past weekend talking to constituents and talking to people at a funeral that I was at — a lot of people are concerned because they see this government continuing to turn.

While they say on one hand they are, they are the government that backs seniors, they are the government that will go to the wall for seniors, on one hand that's what they say. And on the other hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we've seen in the budget, they're also the government that as they did in the late 1970s when they put moratoriums on heavy care facilities, in this budget they've already indicated that they will possibly be looking at further bed closures in the province of Saskatchewan — acute care beds, heavy care beds.

Now I can see the Minister of Finance standing up and saying no we wouldn't have closed those beds, we never closed beds. They're going to be turning and pointing the finger at our area care directors, the health regions, and saying they're the guilty persons.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's coming back to what we're talking about in pension plans, the fact that people in seniors' homes need the resources as well so they can pay for the services that this government is going to continue to put on their backs, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So if you wonder why we are concerned about pension plans, you wonder why we are concerned about how well this government is managing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are some of the reasons. And when this government talks about putting money in people's pockets, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we've seen in the past, well they talk about giving it in one hand, they turn around with the other hand and they take it out. And that's unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So as I find, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find more and more people are beginning to say that we can't really depend on government to provide for us, to meet our needs. Therefore, we need to do more to invest in our future by building a strong, affordable . . . and pension plans that actually will pay us dividends in the end.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the change and the establishment of a

new board to administer this annuity fund is something that we want to be very clear about. We trust that the government has taken this, as the minister's indicated, has taken this seriously. The minister indicated in his speech earlier on, that he recognized the problems of the unfunded defined . . . the defined benefit plan and the reason we needed to move to the annuity plan. And the facts are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if we don't have those pension funds available, if we can't count on government, then who's going to look after us?

And that's the concerns a lot of seniors across the province are having. And as we in this generation and younger, begin to look to our retirement years, those are issues that we are concerned about and we want to see as well. We want to know that when we reach that age where we can retire, we can retire in dignity.

We want to as well realize that when health conditions impact us, that we will have access to those acute care beds, that they will be there to meet our needs and the needs of our family members, our friends and neighbours around us. And unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we get older in life there are for many people the situations where they need a lot of personal care. We want to know that those acute care beds are available for those who need that type of care, and we need to be assured that this government is recognizing that factor.

And the minister is shaking his head. Well, and he's shaking it in the affirmative I must say, but we'll certainly wait and see, and see how well this minister does in his new portfolio as the Minister of Finance to affirm his commitment and the commitment of this government to meet the needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, what we've seen from this government has been nothing. We have seen nothing out of this budget to date that would tell us that this government is prepared to stand up for the people of Saskatchewan; be it seniors, be it young people, be it students, be it the working people of the province of Saskatchewan.

And we see from this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see the lack of a directive regarding the reduction for property tax relief, we talk about it in relation to farmers, we talk about it in relation to property owners. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, property taxes also impact seniors in the province of Saskatchewan.

We talk about the increase in the provincial sales tax and we say, well it only impacts a few. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it impacts seniors in the province of Saskatchewan as well.

And there again we come back to the reasons and to the need for sound financial planning and investment opportunities in the pension plans, even of the public service in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when we . . . Deputy Speaker, when we look at waiting lists in health care, long waiting lists — pardon me — long waiting lists affect seniors across the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we look at this government and its direction — or the lack thereof — in this most recent Throne Speech and in the budget that's just been presented to this province, it is certainly imperative that we plan for tomorrow and that this government start to look beyond

today and look forward to . . . look to tomorrow.

And hopefully the changes made under the Saskatchewan pension plan annuity amendment Act will address some of the concerns that are out there; that there will be some sound financial planners managing this pension fund so that the men and women, who are counting on that pension fund to be there when they retire, will indeed find that this pension fund has been managed wisely.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of other issues we certainly want to address as we look at this piece of legislation very carefully. At this time however I move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member for Moosomin has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — That is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 6 — The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2004

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2004.

Mr. Speaker, The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act pertains to the following defined benefit pension plans: the Liquor Board Superannuation Plan; the Power Corporation Superannuation Plan; the Workers' Compensation Board Superannuation Plan; and the Public Service Superannuation Plan, which also includes the Anti-TB League Superannuation Plan and the Saskatchewan Transportation Company Superannuation Plan.

Each pension plan has a board that oversees its operations. The defined benefit plans were closed to new members in 1977. As at February 29, 2004 there were about 2,500 active members in the pension plans; about 180 inactive members — those who have money invested but are no longer contributing; and close to 8,000 individuals receiving pensions. The largest number of active members and retirees are from the Public Service Superannuation Plan. In less than 10 years it's predicted all members will likely have retired.

Since 1991 eligible members who chose the early retirement option outlined in The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act retired on a date designated by the Lieutenant Governor authorized by order in council. Periodically when all the information is gathered on eligible members who have recently . . . when all the information is gathered on eligible members who have recently chosen early retirement, we prepare the orders in council.

The amendments to The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act recognize the retrospective nature of these

orders in council. Just over 1,000 early retirees have received unreduced pensions and additional benefits. Many are still receiving the benefits.

Mr. Speaker, this is also an ideal opportunity to repeal redundant provisions that no longer apply, to update references, and to make amendments to comply with the Income Tax Act of Canada.

For example, the Act should specify that plan members must choose to receive their pension benefits by age 69, not 71 as it reads now. These amendments are strictly administrative. They have no impact on the General Revenue Fund or the operations of the pension plans.

Mr. Speaker, I hereby move second reading of The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act.

The Deputy Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 6, The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; thank you to the minister. Bill No. 6, an Act to amend the superannuation Act. Well it's interesting in clause no. 3 it begins by reading the right of election by employee to contribute for the superannuation, and where an employee on that day he entered continuous employment was over the age of 45 years but under the age of 60 years, he may, by notice in writing to the board at any time prior to the first day of the last month of employment, elect to contribute for superannuation. And if he so elects, that election is irrevocable.

(16:30)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's interesting that this government . . . It really speaks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the economic plan of this government. Now you stated that these members are in certain areas that are . . . like he had mentioned under the Liquor Board and Workers' Compensation, SaskPower. But this seems to be interesting to note that there are no members in those areas. And the explanation goes on to say, there are no members left in the plans to whom employees' savings account pertain. And the provision is now redundant, and the amendment repeals this section.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in a growing, vibrant economy not only the private sector would be growing and would be needed to broaden the tax base of the economy, but that in turn would allow the need for more people in the public service — very valuable employees in the public service. And as we see, there's a gap where there are no people in those age groups that are considered in the superannuation pension, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And as we've seen with this government, there's no basis for growing the province economically. And we see that people are leaving the province in droves, quite frankly. We have now dipped below 1 million people in this province, and people are taking their families, moving away out of the province. And the

province and the government is losing that potential — potential of economic growth; potential of those taxpayers; the potential of that tax money into government coffers to fund things like education and health, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so this Bill really speaks directly and indirectly to the failures of this government and its economic plan and also speaks to the budget that this government has recently brought down. As we see more people leave this province, Mr. Speaker, as we see there's less and less people in this province earning a wage, we see the need for the government to raise the PST and raise the taxes in this province. Instead of broadening the economic base of this province, the government just seems to have only one thing on its mind — either to cut services or increase taxes in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we see in other areas . . . As we see the government cutbacks in other portions of the budget, it just brings me to mind, even though that these particular government employees aren't under this particular superannuation, but one wonders what individuals in rural service centres are doing. I know there's two employees that are going to be let go in the Biggar rural service centre. And I understand that both of them are just, have served under 20 years on the job and aren't eligible for a pension. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this really sets those individuals and their families in a difficult position. And also there's another person in Biggar is a conservation officer, but I understand that person is able to hold a job in the civil service and is going to be moving to Saskatoon to hold down a job in the regional office there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in so many of these areas, as the minister outlined, that they're . . . because of lack of people in those age groups, that the provisions in the Bill are redundant and . . . because of lack of individuals.

And, Mr. Speaker, back on page, on the areas concerning orders in council. This Bill now will change the, really take the influence of the legislature away, the power of the legislature away, and put it into the hands of order in council. And we've seen the government do this again and again when they introduce Bills. They either take it away from the power and the scrutiny of the legislature and just put it in the hands where order in councils can be made to . . . as in this one case, used to authorize increases in the pension, members' pension.

And, Mr. Speaker, this government has not been very transparent in the past concerning changes. As we've seen, not only orders in council, but putting items . . . introducing Bills and leaving huge gaps in allowing it to be in . . . the holes actually filled in by regulation, outside the scrutiny of the legislature, out by the scrutiny of elected members. And again this is not very healthy for democracy.

This is areas where the legislature should be acting on, and scrutinizing these individual Bills and regulations and allowing a thorough scrutiny of provisions in Bills to be considered, so that the people of the Saskatchewan understand and know what's going on and can bring their input into the legislature through their elected members, instead of having it done just by order in council, and basically hidden and done in . . . kind of in the dark of the night where there's very little scrutiny or

transparency and accountability, quite frankly, to the taxpayer. And I think accountability is one of the major problems by taking out of the hands of the legislature and into just orders in council. And as we've seen so many areas where governments, with the majority, government can just do anything they want.

Now we see since the last election the numbers are quite close in this House, and we in the official opposition has listened to the people of Saskatchewan and they say that they want this government to be more accountable. They don't want this government to just run roughshod over the people of Saskatchewan. And they're saying that there should be, should not be, provisions just to take away the rights of the legislature and put it through . . . make decisions in orders in council and just through regulation.

And, Mr. Speaker, it also speaks to the areas concerning pensions' unfunded liabilities. Mr. Speaker, unfunded liabilities is a debt to be paid off in the future by future taxpayers and citizens of the province.

And the previous two speakers talked about pensions concerning . . . in the private sector where there's contributions made and in some cases, as in Air Canada and other companies, it's almost a unfunded liability from the company involved. And when a company goes into financial difficulty or in receivership, there certainly is a concern that the employees that are pensioned in those businesses possibly could lose their pensions in a bankruptcy.

And we see with the government, particularly with teachers' pensions and its unfunded liability . . . And these are coming due as we come along and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is certainly a strain on the finances in the future. Now those employees are certain they have those pensions coming and worked their whole lives and deserve those pensions. But it certainly is a problem when we see the government making changes in Bills like this, taking it out of the power of the legislature.

Item no. 13 really speaks to increases in superannuation allowances for 1985 and subsequent years, and it states a number of rates that it is . . . as an example, point four per cent of the allowance commenced in 1983; point eight per cent commenced in '82; 1.2 in 1981; 1.6 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1980; 2 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1979; 2.4 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1978; 2.8 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1977; 3.2 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1976; 3.6 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1975; and 4 per cent of the allowance commenced in 1974, an earlier year.

And again the explanation says the increases are no longer made through legislation but are made by order in council. And again, Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a direct assault on democracy. And it does not give the scrutiny that should be given to these areas through the legislature, who are the people of Saskatchewan, have a say, and can bring their opinions to the people, to the legislatures, and to the government. And as we see, as I had mentioned these changes are just made by order in council without the scrutiny made by the legislature.

And again, Mr. Speaker, so many of these provisions are

considered redundant because of lack of people in those areas. Item no. 5(1), provisions are now redundant. And it goes on and on. Provisions are redundant because . . . or there is no people in those particular areas. And, Mr. Speaker, that again speaks to the economic plan — or lack of economic plan — and direction of this government.

Not only the lack of direction but its broken promises they made during the election and now we see that the government is firing 500 civil servants. They're cutting back in areas in rural service centres across the province. They've raised the PST by 1 per cent and now they're threatening to talk about . . . to cancel or shut down hospitals or long-term care beds. And, Mr. Speaker, soon if we continue on this particular direction . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I ask the House to come to order.

And while I'm on my feet, the Deputy Speaker requests leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to introduce my family in the Speaker's gallery, my wife, Karen and my three sons. They're down for the week enjoying an Easter break and I'm quite happy to have them here. So I'd ask all hon. members to welcome my family here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 6 - The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2004 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also bring greetings to your family to the legislature today. It's certainly an appropriate time for families . . . through the Easter break so they can come to the legislature, and I welcome more people to do so.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying about the economic direction of this government which . . . that we've seen the government bringing in increasing taxes, Mr. Speaker, and we look at the Bill. The member says, look at the Bill; well we see the Bill. The Bill says that there's no people in certain age categories; everything seems to be redundant in this Bill.

Well the reason, Mr. Speaker, there's no people in this particular age brackets in this pension plan is because the government has allowed the economy to deteriorate, they have allowed the people of this province to go elsewhere for their future instead of setting up the infrastructure and the conditions that would grow the province and develop this province economically, Mr. Speaker.

And this Bill just reflects that type of thinking in this

government, and again we see that this government does not have a plan to grow the province. But through this Bill, as an example, we see that this government only knows how to try — they don't know how to do it — but they try to manage decline. And this is an example of a government that through this Bill is trying to manage decline, trying to work around why there isn't more people in this province, through this particular pension, living in the province and taking advantage of the great province that we have.

Mr. Speaker, as we know, people that go on pension, they do pay taxes. We need to keep these people in this province. We need to have the health care facilities and the educational facilities in this province. People that are retired would like to stay near their families. But unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, many of the families in this province have had to leave the province to go elsewhere for work, they go to other provinces . . . around the world.

And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, retired people go where their children are and their grandchildren are and in turn not only we've lost the incomes from the children, but we also lose the incomes and the taxes that are paid by the retired people in these provinces that have moved to other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly will look at this Bill in more depth. We'll speak to the stakeholders. We will talk to the experts in the field concerning pensions.

And, Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member for Biggar has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — That is carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — That is carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:45.

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