



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

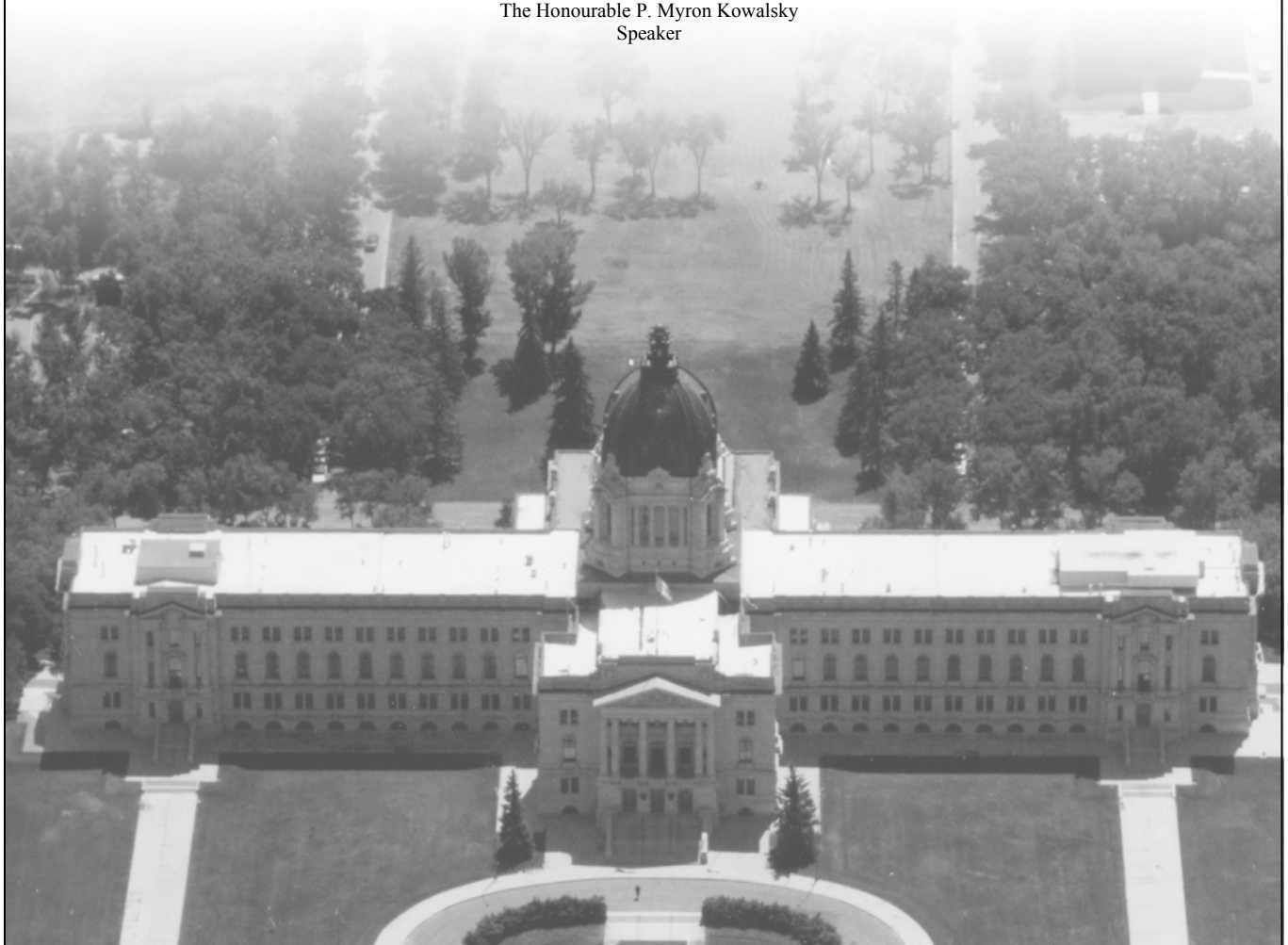
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**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
Quennell, Hon. Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Hon. Len	NDP	The Battlefords
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 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens in my constituency who are very concerned about the closure and possible downsizing of health centres. 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 action to ensure that Radville Marian Health Centre is not closed or further downsized.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by residents of Lake Alma, Radville, and Rocanville.

I so present. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again this morning, I present a petition on behalf of constituents from Cypress Hills concerned with the Crown grazing lease issue. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land lessees maintain their first option to renew those leases.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these particular petitions are signed by citizens from the community of Golden Prairie, Sceptre, and Leader.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are very concerned about the possible closure of long-term care beds in our constituency. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that long-term care facilities in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency are not closed or further downsized.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Weyburn and Halbrite.

I so present.

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with a petition from citizens in my constituency that are extremely concerned about the possibilities of long-term care bed closures and health centre closures. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that the Lafleche & District Health Centre is not closed or further downsized.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good folks of Woodrow and Lafleche.

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 opposed to closure or possible reduction of services at Davidson and 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 the Davidson and Imperial health centres be maintained at their current level of service at a minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctor services available, as well as lab, public health, home care, long-term care services available to users from the Davidson and Imperial areas and beyond.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Davidson, Craik, Bladworth, Saskatoon, and Kenaston.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from constituents who are opposed to possible reduction of health care services in Wilkie. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Wilkie health centre and special care home maintain at the very least their current level of services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Wilkie, Rockhaven, and Biggar.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the possible downsizing or closure of the Herbert Nursing Home. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that the Herbert Nursing Home is not closed or further downsized.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Herbert; Fort St. John, British Columbia; Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; Grande Prairie, Alberta; Hodgeville, Saskatchewan; and Gouldtown, 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 new petition concerning the Foam Lake Health Centre;

And addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 47, 72, 97, 106, 115, 145, 146, 157, 165, and 166.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning, the member for Regina South.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I notice in the gallery a lot of students here today, wearing bright green shirts. These students are with the provincial school safety patrol jamboree, which is in town for the weekend.

In total there are 185 different patrollers here, 30 different chaperones. The patrollers are in grades 6 through 8.

What I want to do today is just briefly read off the large number of communities that these students come from, and maybe they can give a little wave as I name their community. This appears to be in alphabetical order, so starting with Creighton. Where are the Creighton patrollers? Oh, there we go. Estevan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . excellent. We've got Gravelbourg; Hudson Bay; Kindersley, lots from Kindersley — that's good; Lanigan; Nokomis; Maidstone, good; Maple Creek; Martensville; Moose Jaw; Nipawin; North Battleford; Prince Albert. Mr. Speaker, of course, is a representative for P.A. (Prince Albert). You'll notice the enthusiastic response . . . (inaudible) . . . Prince Albert. Regina — well that's pretty good too. Rosetown, Rouleau. Is there anybody here from Saskatoon?

Spiritwood; Strasbourg; Turtleford; Unity — oh, look at Turtleford — Unity; Warman; Watrous; and Weyburn.

Mr. Speaker, these are the safety patrollers who are here. They're going to take the next couple of days and tour around. They're going to go see the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). They're going to take a look at the Science Centre and the IMAX. And I understand this morning that they'll be meeting with two of my colleagues, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, and the member for Regina Wascana Plains. And I look forward to having a chance hopefully to drop by and have a little bit of a visit with them too.

So if you'd join me in welcoming them to this Assembly, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet I would like to introduce to you another group of students who have joined us in the Speaker's gallery. These are a group of grade 11 students who are participating in a very innovative program called the interchange on Canadian studies.

This program is an excellent opportunity for Saskatchewan students to be able to deal with counterparts across the country to discuss current issues. The students who are here today are from a number of communities from across the province, and I would ask that you join with me in welcoming them here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone, the opposition critic for Learning.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming all the students, both in the Speaker's gallery and in the east and west gallery. When I look around in the galleries, I'm glad I got here early and got a seat because the galleries are certainly filling up. But I would like to join with the minister and thank the provincial wide representation that we have in the gallery. It's great to see that the program is not just centred in any major urban centre; it's centred in . . . it's also located in many, many rural communities where students get back and forth to school and home safely.

And so I'd like to thank you for the work that you do. I think sometimes with the House this close we could use your assistance in some crossing in the House here would be nice, some safe crossing. But anyway I'd like to join with the minister and . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I'm thinking this way.

I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming the school safety patrollers here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Martensville.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to

introduce to you and through you to the members of this House in your gallery, some two dozen CAs (constituency assistant) from the people on the right side of the House. They are in Regina yesterday and today checking out what's happening here and getting ready to do a good job back home with the constituents. It's a hard job they do for us; we appreciate it very much. It's tough to be down there in the trenches, Mr. Speaker, fighting the intransigent NDP (New Democratic Party) on behalf of the citizens of this province, so would you join me in welcoming them to their legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Meadow Lake.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly, several young people seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure who orchestrated this, but I have a bit of difficulty with names at times. So this year the summer students in the Department of Highways office and in my own office they have the same first name, so I shouldn't be confused this time. I'd like to introduce to all of you as I've indicated, Nicole Foraié — just give a little wave, Nicole — who is in my office downstairs in room 38; and also seated right beside her is Nicole Griggs, who is in the Department of Highways office.

So please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Centre.

Regina YWCA Honours Women of Distinction

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You may know that last night . . . The Regina YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) has been involved for many years in honouring the talents, achievements, and creativity of the women of southern Saskatchewan since 1981 through their Women of Distinction Awards. These awards celebrate and recognize those women whose qualities, achievements, and commitments are deserving our admiration and respect. It's quite an event, Mr. Speaker. The room was full of very accomplished people.

Mr. Speaker, this year's recipients are, for the arts, Ruth Smillie; for business and trade, the mother and daughter team of Pamela Ait-Allaoua and Gladys Snider of Tot's Cafe; for community leadership and enhancement, Joyce Goodhand.

The recipient of the Cultural Heritage Award is Lydia Chatto; for education the recipient, Ida Remenda. The Health and Wellness Award went to Elaine McNeil for her international work. The Science and Technology and Environment Award presented to Dr. Mary Vetter; for sports, recreation and active living the recipient is Fiona Vincent.

Ashley Norton is recognized as the Young Woman of Distinction, and recognized for lifetime achievement is

Reverend Ruth Taylor.

And it was especially exciting for me, Mr. Speaker, because last night my daughter-in-law, Misty Wensel, was nominated in the arts category for her work in dance and arts education. And for a woman at her stage of her career, this was a very big achievement, and we're very proud of her, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to honour the YWCA and the sponsors of these awards for recognizing women's contributions to our communities. I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in thanking everyone nominated for their efforts and congratulating the Regina YWCA Women of Distinction.

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. I certainly want to join with the minister and congratulate all of the women who were honoured last night, both as nominees and award winners at the YWCA Women of Distinction Awards. They certainly took centre stage for our province — and certainly the southern half of the province — highlighting Saskatchewan's most dynamic, committed, and effective leaders and women of distinction.

And, Mr. Speaker, we need not go over all the categories again, but we certainly want to acknowledge the winners — Ashley Norton, Fiona Vincent, Dr. Mary Vetter, Elaine McNeil, Ina Remenda, Gladys Snider and Pamela Ait-Allaoua, Ruth Smillie as well, and Reverend Ruth Taylor.

And permit me if you will, Mr. Speaker, to provide a little bit more detail on the winner of the Community Leadership and Enhancement Award last night. The category included 10 very, very deserving nominees, the largest number of any category. And the winner was a constituent and a friend of mine — Joyce Goodhand.

Mr. Speaker, Joyce is currently leading the safe shelter team in Swift Current and indeed was its first director. She has been instrumental in the development of programs like career closet program to help women of limited means access appropriate clothing for building careers. Her involvement includes the Allied Arts Council, the South West Victim Services, literacy projects.

(10:15)

And, Mr. Speaker, I spoke with my father this morning. He was a founding board member for that safe shelter committee, and he was very encouraged, excited to hear of her award and highlighted the fact that without her the safe shelter may not exist as it does and provide such effective services.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate her and all of the winners last night, as well as the YWCA for hosting the awards. And to Kristin Kutarna Gates and her team, thanks to them for putting on last night's presentation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Recognition of Mother's Day

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Sunday is Mother's Day. One day is not enough to properly thank our mothers for all they do for us in the course of our lifetime, but the day does provide us with an opportunity to reflect on how they nurture us and how through that nurturing they create the foundation of our society, one individual at a time.

It is a weighty responsibility and one we too often take for granted. Mothers are the ones who, when they aren't at work, are driving us to sporting events or ballet lessons. When they aren't paying the bills, they are baking cookies for our school class. When they aren't keeping our homes running efficiently, they are helping us with our homework. A mother is the ultimate multi-task worker.

It's worth remembering that for the first years of our lives our mothers are the centre of our universe, and — truth be told — no matter where we go or who we become, they are never very far from the centre of our universe because we always carry their lessons with us.

Mr. Speaker, mothers are amazing human beings — there for you when you laugh, there for you when you cry. And no matter how much you take from them, they never stop giving. They guide us, nurture us and love us. Sometimes we make decisions they don't agree with, with us, but they still support us. They can be our greatest critics and our biggest confidantes. They can be our strongest allies, our most formidable adversary, and our best friend all at the same time.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, mothers are amazing human beings, above all I think because of their capacity for unconditional love. And I am pleased to have this opportunity to honour and salute them. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

802 Pipestone Air Cadets Celebration

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last night it was my pleasure to join the 802 Pipestone Air Cadets for their 33rd annual final parade, banquet, and awards.

Mr. Speaker, no doubt the air cadet program through . . . across this country and certainly in this province has been an excellent program, building character and certainly teaching young men and women the value of respect and having . . . just recognizing the ability of other individuals. And what I've seen through the program, Mr. Speaker, is just the way young men and women take pride in presenting themselves and how they work together with others.

Mr. Speaker, this program certainly wouldn't go forward if it wasn't for the volunteer efforts of many individuals and in the

Moosomin . . . or the Pipestone cadet command we have Lieutenant Metzger, Second Lieutenant Garrett, Second Lieutenant Grassick and Lieutenant Youngblut, and additional instructor, Doris Bishop, who we want to say thank you to for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the program, as well as the civilian committee: Nick Hudym, Mike Revet, Ruby McAuley, and Florence Bowey.

Mr. Speaker, this is a worthwhile program. It was indeed an honour to join with the Air Cadets as they celebrated their 33rd annual parade.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Dewdney.

Saskatchewan Job Statistics

Mr. Yates: — Well, well, well, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Saskatchewan job stats released this morning, I know just how James Brown felt when he sang the song, "I Feel Good."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in the House today and report that Saskatchewan is the top job performer in Canada, Mr. Speaker, with 6,000 more jobs in April than there were in March of this year and 6,200 more jobs in April this year than there was in April last year, Mr. Speaker.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, there were 483,000 people employed in the province last month. That's an all-time record for employment for the month of April, Mr. Speaker. What a fitting end to Opportunities Week in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I thought I'd better put this good news in the member's statement today, Mr. Speaker, because I know the opposition who never like to hear or say anything positive about the economic performance of our province won't be asking any questions today about employment numbers in question period, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

School Safety Patrol

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated earlier, we have a large group of school safety patrollers present in the Assembly today to help us recognize and wind up the school safety patrol week in Saskatchewan.

I'm sure I can speak for all members of the Assembly when I send out our sincere thanks and appreciation to all the safety patrollers for their outstanding work all year long. Whether it's in January or in June, whether it's 30 below or 30 above, they help children get to and from school safely — not only their peers but our kids, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, without their dedicated effort and collective

commitment to keeping our streets safe, undoubtedly we would see an increase in the number of traffic related accidents. Mr. Speaker, that's the one thing about traffic safety is you don't know how good of work they actually do. If over the last four or five years, or over the last year they've prevented four or five injuries or accidents, we don't know because they're the ones that have prevented it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the program, the school safety patrol program has been in place for about 70 years. And it's only through the support of many organizations such as government, motor clubs, the CAA (Canadian Automobile Association) — and I see Maureen Murray from the CAA is here today — parent-teacher associations, service clubs, school boards, community businesses, and many other organizations help this worthwhile cause continue.

Mr. Speaker, from all the members in the Assembly, thank you for a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Anita Clark Wins Sterling Award

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, someone once said that the people of Saskatchewan have and I quote, “an overwhelming cooperative spirit and sense of service” and that, quote, “these (are) values (that) are . . . integral (parts) and the essence of who we are.” Today, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about a Saskatoon woman who personifies these attributes.

Anita Clark is a retired nurse and a member of the Royal University Hospital's Ladies' Auxiliary who for the last number of years has been volunteering at the Royal University Hospital. She's worked in the patient library and in the gift shop. She's acted as a tour guide and also assists families whose relatives are in the coronary care or intensive care unit.

Since 1998, Ms. Clark has donated 6,300 hours of her time at RUH (Royal University Hospital), volunteering a minimum of 4 days per week.

Mr. Speaker, last Monday evening at the 14th Annual Silver Spoon Dinner, Anita Clark was named the Sterling Award winner for 2004. The Sterling Award is presented every year to a woman from the Saskatoon area who has enhanced the quality of life in the community through her voluntary contributions. Mr. Speaker, Ms. Clark was nominated for the award by the Saskatoon Health Region and is clearly a worthy recipient.

I ask all my colleagues to join me in congratulating Anita Clark on being named the 2004 Sterling Award winner and for her dedication and service to the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

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

Equalization Formula

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, for almost two months now the NDP has been blaming everything but the common cold for equalization problems that the province is facing. They blamed equalization for breaking a long list of promises they made in the last election campaign. And yesterday the NDP told municipalities that property tax relief, the property tax relief that the Premier promised is going to have to wait until after the equalization issue is dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier is this: if the Premier's solemn promise to provide property tax relief can wait until the equalization issue is resolved or dealt with, why is he in such a hurry to close nursing home and acute care beds in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as predicted, no question about the amazing new jobs in Saskatchewan, as predicted.

And almost as predicted, we thought we would have, with the opposition, a common front on behalf of Saskatchewan people as we seek fair and just equalization for the people of Saskatchewan.

We have working with us the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Saskatchewan Association of Urban Municipalities. We have people from across the province in the business community and the labour community joining with us in this appropriate battle for fair equalization.

We thought we had the opposition, but now I'm beginning to question that, Mr. Speaker. I'm beginning to question that with the kind of questions that are now coming from the Leader of the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, on the first day of assuming my new duties, I sent a letter to the Premier and indicated that we would be supportive on the equalization file, but that the government ought not to use it as an excuse. The equalization situation ought not to be used as an excuse.

And if anyone would doubt the commitment of this side of the House to work with that side of the House on the equalization issue, imagine, Mr. Speaker, the fact that our deputy leader and the Finance critic would travel for 11 hours on a very small plane with the Minister of Finance to make that case in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, here's the truth of the matter. The federal election, the federal election is only perhaps weeks away. Both the federal Liberals and the federal Conservatives have indicated that should they win the election, they want to deal with the equalization issue. So it could be, Mr. Speaker,

before the end of the year, the equalization issue will be dealt with.

The question then for the Premier is this: if his promise, if his solemn promise to reduce the education portion of property taxes for ratepayers in Saskatchewan, if that can wait till the equalization issue is dealt with, why in the world can't the Premier wait in terms of his plan to close acute care beds and nursing home beds in the province of Saskatchewan? Why is he in such a hurry to do that, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, in the days ahead, the opposition and the people of Saskatchewan will see a full description of this government's response to the Boughen Commission. In the days ahead, they will see this government's working with the districts and regions of Saskatchewan, a full description of where we're going in health with 160 million new dollars in the Health budget.

But now let's go back to this little attack on equalization or this falling off from the opposition today. You know it was right in this House, Mr. Speaker, right in this House, the Leader of the Opposition stood up on the day that we did the opening . . . just the day before we were going to do the grand celebration of the Wascana Lake. This Leader of the Opposition said he'd be right there with me to speak to Mr. Goodale. Well I was there. I spoke to Mr. Goodale. I think he was kind of hiding in the crowd.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition, has he done anything about talking to the Minister of Finance from Regina? Has he spoken to Mr. Goodale, and if he has, what has been the response that he has received from Mr. Goodale?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the ice on Cowan Lake, which is located 150 miles northwest of Prince Albert, began to melt this year, it brought people out to the shores of the lake. But something was different this spring, Mr. Speaker, something that was very, very wrong. Residents of Big River on the south shore of the lake were shocked at the disturbing discovery of thousands upon thousands of dead fish.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of the Environment: does his department have any idea as to what caused all of these fish to die?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. And of that particular instance in terms of the fish at Big River, we'll look into it. I want to say

though our priorities are clear on this side — protection of our natural resources — and we will have an answer shortly for the member opposite. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well I have a little bit of a concern about the sincerity about the looking after the environment, but we'll get to that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Cowan Lake is the pride of the area and home to a number of outfitting businesses. People travel from miles around and even from other countries to experience the beauty of the area — the forests, the fishing, the hunting, and much more. The appearance of thousands upon thousands of dead fish is definite cause for concern to the local people, to the businesses, to outdoor enthusiasts, and many tourists and hunters who visit the area.

Mr. Speaker, if the department is not yet investigating the cause of this disturbing discovery, will the minister today commit to a thorough investigation as to the cause of the death of these fish?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — For sure. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and I appreciate the matter being raised because it's one that whenever we have instances like this, we don't want to speculate on causes. So for sure I'll investigate and find out and I'll be back to the . . . report back here to the House. Because protecting our natural resources is number one priority here for this Government of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good to hear that number one priority is the environment. I would have thought maybe health care. Mr. Speaker, I have further questions for the minister — equally as fishy but not about fish.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, some 26,000 members strong, has identified a new threat to the environment that tops the list of potential threats to Saskatchewan's fish and wildlife resources. That new threat, Mr. Speaker, is the NDP government. The federation is in a state of disbelief following the drastic cuts the NDP made to the environment in its latest budget.

(10:30)

Of particular concern to the federation is the NDP's decision to cut 18 conservation officers. The federation accuses the NDP government of decimating conservation officers and I quote: "without any foresight or consideration of the disastrous implications these cuts will achieve."

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: how can his NDP government claim to be committed to the environment on one hand and

threaten wildlife on the other by cutting conservation officers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it ironic that the member opposite obviously shows what the folks over there are up to — more for this, more for that. We have a plan of how to protect this environment. We've reorganized the department. Our emphasis is on protecting our wildlife. We will have over 1,500 people working throughout this province in 43 offices. We have 200 fine officers, conservation officers who will be doing a great job protecting this environment.

We do appreciate the fact that there's been some losses. It's been across the province, but we realigned our priorities to protect those at highest risk. So I think the matter's in fine hands. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order for a moment.

I just want to mention to all the young people that are here today. I can see with their enthusiasm that they would like get into the action that goes on, on the floor here. But the rules of the Assembly are that it's only the members of the Assembly that can actually talk and applaud. So I would ask the young people to just refrain from that and continue to observe the proceedings.

I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, just look at the other side of the House. They're talking about a green and prosperous economy. Another broken promise by this Premier and the NDP government. Because here they are cutting the very core of the people that are protecting it.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is renowned for . . . worldwide for its lakes and natural resources, yet this NDP government has seen fit to threaten all of this by cutting the very people charged with protecting these resources. As Darrell Crabbe, executive director of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation put it, and I quote:

We are the envy of the rest of North America and the world . . . and this was primarily due to the excellent work done by our conservation officers.

The Sask Wildlife Federation says:

The NDP's decision to cut conservation officers will translate into less patrolling, overfishing and an increase in poaching and night hunting.

To the minister, how does the NDP expect to deter such illegal activities when it is cutting conservation officers and reducing patrolling across this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker. I would find it interesting — I appreciate the quotes that the member talks about — but I would like him to quote from his own election platform last fall when he talks about the environment. I will look at that very closely. In fact you have to look at that very closely to find it. It's absolutely zero. There is nothing in the environment from the opposite side.

Yes, and so here we're working hard on the environment. The environment's a key priority for us here and we are working hard. The 1,500 men and women who will be working throughout this province this year in 43 offices across this province are doing a great job to protect this environment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as the members opposite continually want to talk about a green and prosperous economy and they cut the very people that are protecting the environment. Mr. Speaker, one area that was hit particularly hard by the NDP's decision to cut conservation officers, is that of Leader in the Southwest of the province.

Mr. Speaker, Leader and surrounding areas, what some might call the hotspot for chronic wasting disease in deer. Hunters who suspect that they have seen or killed a sick deer or elk are encouraged to call their local conservation officer. Well, Leader doesn't have any now.

Hunters are also encouraged to contact fish and wildlife branch, but the NDP cut that in their latest budget also. The Sask Wildlife Federation has made it clear that for the NDP to and I quote,

. . . to even contemplate, let alone implement these staff reductions and policy changes, shows their true (colour) — and it is not green.

To the minister: how can we continue to monitor CWD (chronic wasting disease) effectively by cutting conservation officers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we're not going to hear about their election platform here because there's nothing here on their commitment to environment, but I can talk a little bit about the chronic wasting disease.

We have identified the three areas along the western part of the province where we are going to be putting resources in to that and that really exemplifies how we're going to work smarter in our department on issues like that. We've identified issues like chronic wasting disease and we're going to put resources in meeting that issue and this is how we're going to work better on issues like that. And so we're reorganizing to meet issues that are out there in the environment.

And I would challenge the members opposite to bring forward ideas like . . . well what was it in their election platform . . . what was missing in their election platform and to think in the big picture.

Here, you know, environment is critical and we're placing our resources where it's important like the issues around chronic wasting disease, and this is an important issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Funding for Prairie Diagnostic Services

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, in the latest NDP budget, Prairie Diagnostic Services had its budget slashed by \$700,000. PDS (Prairie Diagnostic Services) has a broad mandate that includes disease investigation, research, and surveillance; technology development; and teaching student veterinarians. Veterinarians across Saskatchewan are concerned the NDP's cut in funding will cause PDS to close one of its labs in Saskatoon or Regina.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when we are faced with more animal diseases than one can remember including avian flu, BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), chronic wasting disease, West Nile virus, this NDP government has decided to cut funding to PDS.

Can the minister tell the Assembly today, will NDP cutbacks force PDS to close one of its labs? And will closing one of the labs be enough to allow PDS to continue under its current level of funding?

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, on it goes — the Saskatchewan Party going after us that we should spend more money and more money and more money. Well I think as the Minister of the Environment said, we are going to spend money smartly, wisely.

And that's what we're doing in this case, Mr. Speaker; we're investing in PDS, which we know is a very, very vital service to this province. We need to make sure that the diagnostics and the diagnostic work happens on the agriculture-related animals. That is our obligation. That is our responsibility. And so we're making sure that that work will be done. The investments that we're making will make that happen.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have committed \$1.2 million for core funding to PDS this year, but we also pay for analytical testing — \$500,000. We also provide for animal health programs; \$400,000 for lab facilities to PDS.

Mr. Speaker, we're there; we're behind them. We're investing money and we're doing it wisely to get the work done that we need done. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, Bob Bellamy, president of the Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association knows the value of PDS and says that if PDS is closed . . . forced to close or reduce its services, he would find it difficult to practise effectively. The SVMA (Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association) is concerned about these cuts in the light of many animal diseases facing our province today.

In a recent letter, Mr. Bellamy points out, and I quote:

The ability of our system to monitor, test for and quickly diagnose these and other diseases capable of being transmitted from animals to humans will be severely compromised if PDS were to restrict or shut down some of (its) services.

Mr. Speaker, we have already seen the devastating impact BSE has had on Saskatchewan. These diseases have the potential to depopulate wild species, devastate agriculture, and endanger human health and severely impact our economy. And yet the NDP sees fit to cut PDS's funding.

To the minister: what services will be curtailed at PDS as a result of this government's decision to cut funding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in terms of Prairie Diagnostics, the key area that we need to focus on in this province — and we see this in the diseases that have come forward in the last few years — we need to focus on the agriculture sector. We need to make sure that the diagnosis is being done on large animals, on agricultural-related animals. We don't want Avian flu coming into the province. We need to make sure that we've got diagnosis for birds.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about another prairie diagnosis and that is, Mr. Speaker, the diagnosis that we are seeing when we look across the way there. We're seeing people who are suffering from grief. And the symptoms are all there. The diagnosis is that they can't get over the fact that they lost that last election, Mr. Speaker. They can't get over it.

We see it in the fact . . . We see it in the fact of anger and denial. We see it in the fact now that they're trying to even engage in resurrection. They're taking that platform that wasn't on their Web page and now they're trying to resurrect it and put it back on. Mr. Speaker, they are devoid of good ideas for this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Cute, Mr. Speaker, but not very effective or helpful. One of the valuable services the highly qualified staff of PDS provide is testing for chronic wasting disease.

On Tuesday the Minister of Agriculture told the Committee of Finance that the department is responsible for testing elk heads because they want to be able to provide proof that Saskatchewan is CWD free and get the elk market moving again.

What the minister did on Tuesday was simply pay lip service to the issue. How can testing for CWD be a priority when the NDP has chosen to cut funding for Prairie Diagnostic Services? Yet another example of the NDP saying one thing and doing the opposite.

Can the minister tell this Assembly if these cuts will result in a decrease in testing for CWD?

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, the agriculturally related diseases are the ones that we want PDS to be testing for. It's not about testing for small animals.

What I want to say in terms of the investments that we have made, because we are partners in PDS as a government and the investments that we have made have been significant, we now, through those investments, have \$1 million in equity, largely in equipment purchases. And so we are not at a beginning stage here with PDS. This is ongoing funding. We are putting \$1.2 million into core funding and we will be doing the testing that needs to be done to keep our agricultural industry safe. That's the fact; that's where we are investing. Mr. Speaker, we are going to make sure that the work is done and done properly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Education Portion of Property Tax

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the NDP held a news conference to announce their latest excuse for breaking all the Premier's campaign promises. This time it's equalization. And, Mr. Speaker, we agree that the equalization formula is unfair. But that same equalization formula was unfair last fall. That didn't stop the Premier from promising to cut property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier never had any intentions of keeping that promise. And now the election's over, he has to invent an excuse. Mr. Speaker, instead of inventing excuses, why doesn't the Premier just for once keep his word?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I wish for once that the members opposite would take a look at what the actual fact is in terms of what this government said. We said — and I will quote once again from the party's platform in this last election in which the voters of this province elected a New Democratic

government, a majority government — we said that:

Quality . . . education requires a sound funding base. The challenge is to raise those funds in a fair, (and) balanced way. We want to ensure we do that while making Saskatchewan property taxes as fair as possible.

That is what we committed to do. That is what we are going to do. And the member opposite should at least be upfront and honest and accurate in his comments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be honest. That Premier said the status quo is not on. What happened to that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, yesterday a reporter asked the Minister of Government Relations why anyone would believe the NDP on property taxes. And he said, and I quote:

There's got to be some kind of trust that what we say, we will eventually do.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, trust us.

Well, Mr. Speaker, who in this province would even dream of trusting that government. What they're saying is amazing.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has systematically broke every election commitment he made and now is saying, just trust us; we'll fix it. The Premier promised to cut taxes; he raised taxes. The Premier promised to protect seniors; now he's kicking them out of their beds.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier back up his election campaign and do at least one thing they said they would do at that time?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is quite right. The last election was about trust. We asked very specifically who Saskatchewan people trusted. And Saskatchewan people said they trusted this Premier, this government, and this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting. It is worth noting that we did not need to boot out our leader after the election.

The Speaker: — Order please. Order please, members. The Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that no member on this side needed a do-over to get their nomination. It's worth noting that we did not need to boot our leader out after the election. It is worth noting that our platform stands public scrutiny and comments on key public issues whether it's environment, whether it is property taxes, whether it is the issues of health care. The members opposite cannot speak in favour of any of those issues because they did not have public trust.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if that Premier keeps breaking his promises, they might want to consider kicking that leader out.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I know for one thing the rest of the province is ready to put him out of his job. Mr. Speaker, that Premier has broken every one of his promises. He's broken about half of Roy Romanow's promises, and now he's actually even breaking some of Tommy Douglas's promises.

Mr. Speaker, that Minister of Government Relations has the nerve to say, trust us. He's asking SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipality) and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) to trust us. After saying in the election one thing — they would deal with the education tax on property — and then yesterday saying, well trust us. We may fix it in 2004, 2005, or we may use it in the next election. Mr. Speaker, what is it? Is that Premier going to back up his election promise and deal with the education tax on property?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — This government will keep its commitment dealing with education and property tax reform. That is what the minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has said, that is what the Premier has said, that is what I have said, and no amount of bluster, no amount of bluster and anger by that member will change that.

This approach that that member has taken in terms of the character assassinations that they've attempted on this side is really, frankly too low even for them. It is shocking, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order please, members. Order. I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House have presented a platform which met with the support of Saskatchewan people. It outlined a comprehensive set of issues that we will deal with during this term of government. It is time that the members opposite accept that. The Leader of the Opposition — the new Leader of the Opposition — claimed that he was going to stretch his party so that they could bring in

new ideas.

Instead, just two days ago, he re-announced their old economic plan. Nothing new there. He's put back up his old platform on the Web site. The only difference in that operation is a difference in the picture as to who the Leader of the Opposition is. That is the only change that we have seen and that is not going to be sufficient to either build consensus in this House or for them to gain public . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — Order, please. Is the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley up for ministerial statements? Ministerial statements. Order, please. Ministerial statements. I recognize the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Agricultural Research and Development

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to share with the House another example of the Government of Saskatchewan's continued commitment to agriculture research and development in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — This government annually invests over \$12 million in various agricultural research and development programs. As part of this commitment the Agriculture Development Fund, the ADF, has invested 2.64 million in 22 new agriculture and food research projects. The ADF is one of several tools employed by this government to increase the value of agriculture and value-added processing in our province. The fund includes three programs: the research and development projects program, the agri-value program, and the strategic research program.

The strategy is based to a large extent on increased use of food and food components for health and wellness, demand for bio-based feedstock in manufacturing and industrial products, maintaining a healthy and sustainable environment, and consumer demand for safe food. The specific goals of our strategy include increased livestock production and diversification to higher value crops, increased value-added activities to support our manufacturing strategy, enhanced environmental stewardship, and maintaining the highest standards in food safety.

Some specific projects funded include the development of technology for bio-herbicides, 131,325; the development of crop management options . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, some of the specific projects funded include the development of technology for bio-herbicides, \$131,325. The development of crop management options to improve and enhance the seed yield and

quality of our chickpea crop, \$123,050. The Swift Current watershed monitoring project which will assess water quality for various agricultural issues, \$90,000.

Over \$660,000 to the Crop Development Centre at the University of Saskatchewan; 120,000 to the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, and I could go on, Mr. Speaker. There are 22 worthy projects in total.

This demonstrated support for research and development initiatives to create new scientific knowledge and technologies will open doors, Mr. Speaker. It will open doors to new opportunities. It will open doors to new jobs, and this support will generate new wealth for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I also want to note just a slight apology. It is our practice to try and get these ministerial statements to the opposition in a timely manner that they can have a good chance to look over them. This one was just delivered to me and I would like to publicly state my apologies to the critic opposite for not getting it into his hands earlier. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek, the opposition critic for agriculture.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I accept the minister's apology. Mr. Speaker, we're always pleased to see that this NDP government at times shows any interest at all in agriculture — pleased, Mr. Speaker, and generally a little surprised.

And to see that the ADF is investing \$2.64 million in new agricultural and food projects does appear to be good news on the surface, and it'll be interesting when we get the complete list, among other things, to see if these are really all new initiatives.

It is noted however, that this money is being spread over 22 projects. As yet we don't know who and what these projects are, and we wonder if this may be spreading the funds a bit thin.

Mr. Speaker, this government has taken \$700,000 from Prairie Diagnostic Services — one of our most established and important ag research institutions — whose mandate includes disease investigation, research, and surveillance. This includes several livestock diseases that can be spread to humans.

And the NDP government, Mr. Speaker, refuses to properly fund the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization from Saskatoon — a world-class institution that develops cures for many of these same diseases and others that can affect livestock and humans. VIDO (Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization), Mr. Speaker, has the potential to be a \$62 million-plus international vaccine centre that may have to close its doors because it has trouble meeting payroll.

It will be interesting to see, Mr. Speaker, who and what will be collecting this \$2.64 million in research money. And the

agricultural industry will be watching with interest. They don't trust this government, Mr. Speaker, and neither do I.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 41 — The Contributory Negligence Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 41, The Contributory Negligence Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read the first time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Justice — order, please — that Bill No. 41, The Contributory Negligence 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: — The motion is carried.

Deputy Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Next sitting of the 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.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Remarks Out of Order

The Speaker: — Members, before orders of the day, I would just like to bring to the attention of the member for Melville-Saltcoats that during his question today he accused another member of dishonourable motives. Such statements are out of order, and I would ask him not to repeat a statement like that again.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a response to written question no. 271.

The Speaker: — Response to 271 has been submitted.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Health Care

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the motion that the Saskatchewan Party is introducing today where we are calling on the NDP to heed the words of the former premier of this province, Roy Romanow, who admitted he made mistakes with the cuts that he made to health care when he was the premier of this province during the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, Premier Romanow made this speech when he spoke to the Western Canadian Nurse Leaders Forum in November 2003. And I would just like to quote some of the things that Mr. Romanow indicated at that time, so it's on the record for the people of Saskatchewan. And hopefully that the NDP under the Premier of the province today will heed the words and will listen to them before they go ahead with the proposed cuts in long-term care and in hospital beds and hospital closures that they are putting forward throughout the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, Premier Romanow said, and I quote, that he said that there were mistakes made in the 1990s. And when he was questioned further about the mistakes that were made by the reporter that was interviewing him at this time, Mr. Romanow said that there was a false economy at that time, and I quote:

“We pushed the costs out of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers and business people and nurses.” . . .

And, Mr. Speaker, we have witnessed the evidence of what Mr. Romanow has indicated here — how the people across this province tightened their belts, realized that there were things that had to be dealt with in this province, and have paid the price.

And today what we see in this province is not a better health care system because of the sacrifices that were made and more money put into health care. But what we see is a deteriorating health system where we have some of the worst records in all of Canada for what is provided in Saskatchewan. We have the longest surgical waiting lists; we have the longest diagnostic waiting lists — two years, up to two years, Mr. Speaker, for an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).

Mr. Speaker, we have long waiting lists in emergency rooms, many days in Regina that both emergency rooms are on a code burgundy. People are turned away from emergency because there is no bed for them available in the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, because of these issues, we have seen a mass exodus of nurses and other health care professionals; we have seen a mass exodus of doctors from this province. And as we see these things continue, we see nurses under stress; we see overtime being paid out; we see nurses that can't even access holidays because they are so dedicated to their profession that when they are called on their days off, they will go in, and they

will help out in whatever way they can.

And because of this we have seen a continual deterioration of health care across the province. And at the same time we see the NDP government in this province do nothing but throw more money at the issue with no solutions, no willingness to talk to doctors and nurses and other health care professionals that might have and could have solutions for the problems that we face in the province.

Mr. Speaker, Roy Romanow went on to indicate that there were other things that were of concern to him, things that he was involved with when he was the premier of this province. Mr. Speaker, he indicates that there was:

Between 1991 and 1994, the provincial government decreased the amount it spent on health care, with the biggest reduction in 1993 (and '94) . . . (with) \$120 million or 7.4 per cent was chopped from the Health budget. That paved the way for cuts to close 52 rural hospitals. They closed the Plains hospital; they axed the children's dental plan; they scaled back on the prescription drug plan.

(11:00)

Mr. Speaker, there were also cuts to the payment for chiropractic treatments; there were increases to nursing home fees; there were higher ambulance costs implemented; charges for appliances for such things as fibreglass casts; and more cost for people that require diabetic supplies.

This from the government that believes in access for everyone in this province to universal health care. This from the government that indicates that they are going to provide quality health care for everyone in our province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to quote another individual that is in the government today, the member from Saskatoon Nutana. And this was back when the member was in opposition in the 1980s. And I'd like to quote firstly and . . . from *Hansard* in November 1987 and from the member of Nutana:

The health situation in this province is out of control . . . We have a drug plan where people are making decisions between (guess what) groceries and prescription drugs. Too little too late.

This, Mr. Speaker, in 1987 when the member was in opposition. And now we have the premier of the province that was in charge of this province in 1990 saying, we made a mistake in the 1990s by cutting costs, by not covering prescription drugs, and by increasing the deductible.

A further quote from the member from Saskatoon Nutana in November 1987, and I quote:

. . . in view of all . . . the evidence and all . . . the concerns that have mounted over the last several months, will you, as Acting Minister of Health on behalf of your government, stop hacking and slashing away at our health care system.

This from the member who now sits in the Legislative Assembly and is part of a government that previously has slashed and burned health care across this province. In 1993, 52 hospitals closed in rural Saskatchewan; the Plains hospital closed.

We had a meeting in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, at that time, and people from all across my riding came and filled McKenna Hall. There was one voice — one lone voice in the room that agreed with what the government was going to do, which was to close rural hospitals, to downsize services, to close the Plains hospital.

Did this government listen? No. They went ahead and they closed the Plains hospital and all those other hospitals. And today we see the same government not heeding the words of the former premier of this province who said it is a mistake what they did in the 1990s; it was a mistake to close those facilities. We have not improved health care in this province because of it; in fact it has deteriorated.

And, Mr. Speaker, we now see the Premier of this province and his colleagues that are going to go down the same path as the former premier did. Did they learn nothing from what the former premier has indicated were the problems in this province?

Further, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote again from the minister from Saskatoon Nutana, in 1987 from *Hansard*, and I quote:

... in view of the fact that nearly 100,000 Saskatchewan citizens have sent you a clear message to reverse your harmful and hurtful health care cuts, will you now listen to the people of Saskatchewan?

At that time the member was speaking to the Conservatives who were in power at that time. And today we have the same request from the people of this province, only it is to the NDP government of which the member from Saskatoon Nutana is a member.

And, Mr. Speaker, what she was asking for at that time was for the government to listen to the people of Saskatchewan before they revert ... they decreased any more health care in the province. What we are asking today, Mr. Speaker? And what the member from Melville or from ... what's our member? The critic of Health for the Saskatchewan Party, the member from Melfort — sorry, Mr. Speaker — moved a motion last week asking for the government to listen to the people of this province before they went ahead and made further cuts in health services across the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go back further to Mr. Romanow's letter ... or Mr. Romanow's speech when he spoke to the nurses, and I quote from Mr. Romanow, and he said, and I quote: you had a whole variety of little add-on charges here, there and everywhere. They started a whole bunch of opt-out and basically user charges on a variety of things.

And Mr. Romanow further went on to say that, he told the nurses in Saskatchewan that:

... (the) prescription drug ... has ... (been) increasingly

higher deductibles and is no longer "universal".

And he said:

I ... (do not) take any pride in this but it's now reduced to basically those at the very bottom end of our scale, the very poorest.

And end quote of Mr. Romanow. So, Mr. Speaker, we see that Mr. Romanow too late realized the mistakes that he made when he was the premier of this province.

And what the people of Saskatchewan are crying out for is, will this government listen to them? Will they listen and not close more facilities in rural Saskatchewan? Because if they do, Mr. Minister ... Mr. Speaker, it will not only be the people of rural Saskatchewan that will pay the price. It will be everyone in Saskatchewan because this government has decided that they're going to move all the care into Regina and Saskatoon, and all that that has done, Mr. Speaker, is cause more pressure on Regina and Saskatoon.

That is why we have problems in the emergency department, why we have people lined up in ambulances waiting to get in for care. That is why we have code burgundies going on. And yet at the same time we have facilities throughout rural Saskatchewan. We have doctors that are willing to provide care, and that would gladly provide care for rehab, for palliative care, and yet they are not able to do that because we have a government that continually is downsizing the facilities in rural Saskatchewan.

In my constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, when I was first elected we had 100 beds. We now have 30 beds, Mr. Speaker. And it's time that the people that are in government today started heeding the words of Premier Romanow and stop further reduction of health care facilities and beds across the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to quote from *Hansard* back in the year of 2000. And, Mr. Speaker, at that time, sadly, what the Saskatchewan Party brought forward in May 2000 was a motion that is very similar to what we are talking about today, asking for the government to heed the words of the former premier which at that time ... and saying that we do not ... that we are asking the "government to put a moratorium on any further hospital or health (care) centre closures at least until the government's promised comprehensive review of health care services in Saskatchewan ..."

And, Mr. Speaker, we have now had the Fyke report. And when the Fyke report was finished, the Fyke report said go ahead; we need to close more hospitals. That's the answer. And what happened at that time was that the then ... the Minister of Health indicated that that was not the answer, that this government would not go there, they were not willing to close more facilities. Now we have two years later, we have the Minister of Health with support of the Premier of the province supporting this, and his colleagues saying that this is what we should do, is we should go ahead and close more facilities.

And, Mr. Speaker, there is an article in the paper today which is headed, talks shelved as union awaits cuts. And we also see where the head of CUPE (Canadian Union of Public

Employees), Stephen Foley, and Rosalee Longmoore, the head of the SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association) or of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses . . . I apologize, Rosalee Longmoore, are also calling of the government to be careful, to take precautions and not to go forward and start closing facilities and reducing beds without proper consultation and without properly looking at what is going to happen and the ramifications of actually closing these facilities.

And, Mr. Speaker, the motion that we want to move today reads: That this Assembly urge . . . moved by myself, member of Weyburn-Big Muddy, seconded by the member from Melville-Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government, now contemplating more cutbacks and facility closures in Saskatchewan, to heed the words of former Premier Roy Romanow who, in November 2003, said similar cuts in the early 1990s were a mistake and were based on a "false economy" that "pushed the costs out of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers, business people, and nurses.

And, Mr. Speaker, this could not be more true words, and we applaud Premier Romanow for admitting that they did make mistakes. I guess one of our major questions is when he was premier of the province, why did he go forward and do these things? Why did he cause this harm to come upon the people of this province?

And today, we're still paying the price. We are still paying the price in that we had cuts to nursing programs. Another issue that the former Premier Romanow indicated, was that he admitted that his government was wrong to slash enrolments in nursing programs in 1991 and '92. More than 500 nurses graduated from the program. But 1998-99, the number of graduates had fallen to 115.

Mr. Speaker, I call on the members opposite, many who have been ministers of Health or deputy ministers of Health. There is the member from Yorkton; the member Saskatoon Nutana; the member from Riversdale; the member from Regina Lakeview, who is the current Minister of Health; the member from Saskatoon Massey Place; the member from Saskatoon Eastview — who have all played a part in bringing us to where we are today.

I call on them, Mr. Speaker, to listen to the words of Roy Romanow, who said we made a mistake, who said that we should look at where we've come from and not make those mistakes in the future, who said that these decisions were made ". . . based on a 'false economy,'" that they ". . . pushed the costs out of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers . . . business people and nurses."

I ask, Mr. Speaker, if there's one MLA on the government side who can see what is happening, who is willing to look at our health care system, who is willing to admit that spending more money has not improved health care . . . It has caused it to deteriorate. I ask them: do they care about the sick and elderly in this province? Do they want people — no matter what age, income, or walk of life — to have timely access to adequate health care? If they do, Mr. Speaker, then I ask that they adhere

to the words of Premier Romanow, and at this time I move the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order please, members. It has been moved by the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, seconded by the member for Melville-Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government, now contemplating more cutbacks and facility closures in Saskatchewan, to heed the words of former premier Roy Romanow who, in November 2003, said similar cuts in the early 1990s were a big mistake and were based on a false economy that pushed the costs out of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers and business people and nurses.

I recognize the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure I can take part in the debate today because I think the debate today is on such a crucial issue to people from all over Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, but especially in rural Saskatchewan where health care has been hit hard in the last 10, 12 years by this NDP government and is about — from what we understand — is to take another hit if according to the budget and the Health minister has been telling us has any merit to it. We will see more closures in the hospital system. We will lose long-term care beds out there. And when we have an aging population, Mr. Speaker, that's the last thing we can have happen in Saskatchewan, both urban and rural, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and this is not just strictly a rural issue. This is an urban-rural issue because every time a health care closure happens in rural Saskatchewan, the rural people, my constituents included, have to come into the cities like Saskatoon and Regina. And the systems in here are already overloaded. We have the longest waiting lists in the country. And it hurts health care for both the people of Regina-Saskatoon and the other cities when the health care in rural Saskatchewan is depleted.

I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP always say how they support publicly funded, publicly administered health care when the waiting lists are so long in this province, Mr. Speaker, that people every day are telling us they have to either go to the States or to Alberta for MRIs. And, Mr. Speaker, now it turns out it's the Saskatchewan Party that actually is the one that supports the publicly funded, publicly administered health care in accordance with the health Act because people across this province, Mr. Speaker, are telling us more and more that Saskatchewan health right now has more two-tier health in it than ever before. And people in rural Saskatchewan can tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

If you can afford to drive — say, for dialysis treatment, Mr. Speaker, is a prime example — if you can afford to drive from Kamsack, Saskatchewan to Regina or Saskatoon three times a week out of your own pocket, Mr. Speaker, not out of the publicly funded health care system, but out of your own pocket, Mr. Speaker, it's your cost. What else is that, Mr. Speaker? It's two-tier health. And the problem being with the dialysis system

that we have, it took years to get the government to finally put a dialysis unit into the city of Yorkton. And, Mr. Speaker, we still have 18, 19 families driving a member of their family — some up to three times a week — to the city of Regina because Yorkton doesn't have enough qualified people, I'm told, to run the unit for more hours.

(11:15)

Now, Mr. Speaker, how ridiculous this can be? People — say, from the Kamsack area or my colleague's area from Canora-Pelly, from Preeceville, out in that area, even from Canora, you get Esterhazy, Rocanville, from my colleague from Moosomin's area — these people spending their own money two and three times a week to drive for dialysis treatment when that treatment could be provided at the same cost, the same cost to the publicly funded health care system but a lot less cost and a lot less time consuming, Mr. Speaker, for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Weyburn talked about the last times we had health care cuts, hospital closures, and downsizing in our health care system — 1992. And it was odd, Mr. Speaker; I might mention that before that election, the NDP never mentioned in their election campaign that there would be any health care closures.

Does that ring a bell, Mr. Speaker, with it? You bet it does because in the last election in November, there was no word from that government that there would be health cuts, that there would be hospital closures, that seniors would get kicked out of long-term care beds. Mr. Speaker, there was nothing about that.

And now what do we have? As soon as the election is over and the smoke clears, the first thing we hear, well we can't afford to do what we said we were going to do, so we're going to close hospitals. We're going to kick our seniors out of long-term care beds.

Well, Mr. Speaker, people are getting tired of this. Fifty-two hospital closed in 1992. And, Mr. Speaker, I was very close to one of those hospitals in my constituency. The community of Langenburg had raised about \$3 million to build a new hospital, a new facility in that area, along with the Saskatchewan Health. The system, the money was set up. Planning was done. Everything was in place. And you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? As soon as the election was over, that project went down the tubes. It was gone. So the trust that those people have in this government in 1992 was weakening.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we come to 1995 — 1995, the government saw fit after the election . . . and it's always after the election this happens, Mr. Speaker. They closed another three or four hospitals. And one of them, Mr. Speaker, was the Plains hospital. And, Mr. Speaker, the load that closing the Plains hospital put on the General and the Pasqua here is hurting health care in the city of Regina. It has since 1995. It's added to the longest waiting lists in the country. It's adding to the emergency rooms being overloaded. It's just totally degraded the health care that the people in the city of Regina expected and should expect, Mr. Speaker.

And if we're going to see another round of closures and another

round of closing long-term care beds, it's not just hurting the people in my constituency of Melville-Saltcoats, Mr. Speaker, it's not just hurting the Leader of the Opposition's constituency of Swift Current or the member for Thunder Creek or Cypress Hills or Moosomin, Watrous, all over this province, it's hurting every person that expects and deserves adequate publicly funded health care by this NDP government in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing too . . . And I have greatest respect for the previous premier of this province, Mr. Romanow. And even Mr. Romanow is saying now, we have made mistakes in the past. So what that says to me, is the previous premier had the intestinal fortitude when mistakes were made to come forth now. And who would know better than him, because he was the premier at the time and now he is doing a study on health care in this country and realizes mistakes were made.

Mr. Speaker, it's bad enough to make mistakes, but it's worse if you make mistakes and you won't admit, and try to make those same mistakes over again. And this is what we're going to see from this government, Mr. Speaker. This is what we're going to see from this Premier, this Health minister — the same mistake made over and over again. And, Mr. Speaker, people of Saskatchewan cannot afford this. Our health care system cannot afford this.

Mr. Speaker, we have had on many occasions in this session already, where people have brought their concerns forward . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, members. I would ask members to find another forum for second debate.

The member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the previous premier goes on in a number of quotes that the premier has said, and it goes on to say, even Romanow acknowledges that this ND (New Democratic) government made huge mistakes with their changes to health care.

Leader-Post:

Romanow . . . has admitted the deep cuts to provincial health-care services in the 1990s were a mistake.

They closed 52 hospitals and the premier of the day is saying that is a mistake. And yet this government, after hearing those comments, are turning around and going to reinvent the wheel and do it all over again.

And the scary part, Mr. Speaker, is the people of Saskatchewan are helpless in this case. This NDP government has the power to make these cuts and are not going out to check with communities out there; they're not checking with the public of Saskatchewan. They're going to go ahead full bore.

And the thing, Mr. Speaker, they cannot tell you, are they going to save money by closing these hospitals? They cannot prove that it's going to shorten waiting lists. They cannot prove that you're going to get an MRI in less than two years, as you have to wait right now.

Mr. Speaker, they can't actually show anybody on paper or any other way that this is going to improve health care in Saskatchewan. If they could, Mr. Speaker, I think there would be a little sympathy for what they are planning on doing. But their record has shown it has not worked in the past. The previous premier is saying, it will not work now; it didn't work before. And they're not listening to anyone, Mr. Speaker.

They don't have a plan for the future of this province. It doesn't matter whether it's health care, education, agriculture, or the economy of the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, they're going from day to day. And the first thing they see, well, maybe we can save some money by cutting what, Mr. Speaker — 20, 30, 40 hospitals in the province of Saskatchewan; maybe we could save a few bucks by kicking the seniors out of their long-term care beds. And this is a time, Mr. Speaker, when the population and the age of seniors is growing in Saskatchewan. We don't need less long-term care beds, Mr. Speaker; we need more long-term care beds.

I know at our long-term care facility at home, there's actually a waiting list. And the thing is, Mr. Speaker, I would bet in every long-term care facility in the province of Saskatchewan, if you check, there's a waiting list of seniors that need to be in long-term care homes. And by cutting beds, Mr. Speaker, we're only adding to the problem.

And by cutting hospitals, closing hospitals, we're going to see longer waiting lists; we're going to see MRI services probably go from two to three years. Mr. Speaker, people are dying in Saskatchewan on the waiting lists, waiting for health services.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is why I was seconding this motion and support the motion:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government, now contemplating more cutbacks and facility closures in Saskatchewan, to heed the words of former premier, Roy Romanow, who in November 2003 said similar cuts in the early '90s were a big mistake and were based on a "false economy" that "pushed the costs out of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers and business people and nurses."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — I am very happy to stand today and speak to this motion. In the interest of clarity, I am going to read the exact quote of Mr. Romanow, as I believe the motion as stated reflects neither the content nor the intent.

Until the mid-90s, (Mr. Romanow says), some provincial governments — charged as they are with the primary responsibility for the delivery of health — including my own in Saskatchewan, were successful in restraining the growth in public health . . . costs (while attempting to reform the system). We rationalized our services and improved efficiencies, while trying (not always successfully) to preserve access to quality services.

Most governments had no choice but to pursue these remedies, given the harsh fiscal realities of the day, and I still support my government's approach of the time.

And while we're quoting Mr. Romanow, since he has said many, many things that I think are useful to talk about, I'm going to read some more of the things he spoke about. He talked about sustainability. And sustainability, he says:

. . . as we defined it, means "ensuring sufficient resources are available over the long-term to provide timely access to quality services that address our evolving health (care) needs."

He says:

I deliberately used the word resources rather than money. In addition to cash, a properly functioning health delivery system also depends on the right type of health care providers, buildings, equipment and information systems.

He talks about how we have to figure out how those resources to . . . how to apply those resources to our evolving health care needs as quite a challenge.

Most of us when we talk about change are fairly resistant. And when we have seen . . . When the member from Weyburn was talking about, do any of us over here know what it's like to be involved in the health system and the decision making, well I have come from an unique perspective. I am a health provider. I am a registered nurse. I've been a registered nurse for over 30 years. I've been a nurse union leader for over five years. I've been the Minister of Health for two and a half years and an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for six years.

So during that time, I have seen the health system from many, many perspectives. And when we talk about some of the things that we need to do, our system is not stagnant. Our system changes. The needs of our citizens change. And we need to keep up with those changes. And we need to change our system to meet the needs as those needs are given to us or shown to us.

Governments that are directly involved need to keep those needs in balance with the other needs of the province, which are education and highways and all the other things we need to do that are competing for our public dollars. So when we spend our money, we need to spend it in the most efficient and effective way. And when we talk about hospitals, which we have in Saskatchewan — quite an abundance of hospitals still — and we also still use those hospitals quite frequently.

We have hospitals, for example, who have 14 acute care beds funded. And their average daily census — that means how many people are on average in those facilities a day — are four. So when we talk about how we are spending our money, I don't think anybody would think that that's value for our dollar.

And when we talk about quoting Mr. Romanow, I have his report here which is useful for someone to read all of it because he's says many things that are worthwhile talking . . . and in particular about change. And he talks about, "health strategies should be focused on outcomes." What we do should make a difference.

And what we do now doesn't always make a difference. When we keep a hospital open with 14 beds and only use 4, does that make a difference?

He talks about:

Policies, (and) strategies and programs should be based on evidence . . .

Again we should see what we're doing, if it makes a difference. And just because we've always done it, doesn't mean we should still do it.

And when we also talked about health, health care does not equal health. What makes us healthy — and I think I've stood here and said this for six years — what makes us healthy is not whether we have access to a doctor, to a bed, to a building. What makes us healthy in large part is determined by our choices. And when we make those choices we have to talk about what we ourselves . . . what our responsibility is as citizens. We do have a choice and we do have an impact on how our health will go.

And when we talk about primary health care, which is a particular interest of mine, we're talking about reorganizing how people access the system. And we don't talk about the building. We talk about the services that people will get. And we talk about what do they need? And what they need is what's available right in front . . . close to their home, is basic services.

One of the doctors in the report I saw compared primary health services to the corner grocery store where we have bread and milk, and he compared the other services in the bigger centres to specialty grocery stores. So what you have on every corner or a corner very close to you are the basic needs. You need to talk to somebody when your child has an earache. You need to talk to somebody if you have certain symptoms that are confusing or worrisome.

Now we have the 24-hour advice line. That is something that everyone can access for those times when you just need to talk to somebody.

Traditionally we all went to emergency if we had a problem or we all made a doctor's appointment. That is not the best use of our money. We need to talk about making different choices and making different things available to us so that we can make those choices.

And Mr. Romanow also talks about transformative change. And he particularly is interested in primary health care because that's where we will see the savings to the system in the long term. When we make an investment in primary health care, we're going to see long-term benefits; long-term benefits in shifting our focus from illness to wellness.

And people have pooh-poohed us on that over the years because people have not seen the value of wellness and think it's fairly simplistic. But we do have to talk about the choices that we make. Our diet, our exercise, everything we choose to do will make an impact on our health. Our high rates of diabetes are influenced by our lifestyle to a large part. So we have an impact on our own system and our own use of the system.

And we also need to talk about the plan that we have. And I heard the member opposite say we don't have a plan. Well I don't know where she's been.

Here's the plan — 2001, the action plan for health. We had Fyke come. We had Ken Fyke come around, and he did a commission and a study. From his commission report, we had the Standing Committee on Health hold public hearings. Following that we developed our action plan for health. And not only have we stopped . . . We didn't stop by just developing the action plan; we now have a progress report. So if anybody's interested in finding out what's ongoing in the health system, here it is, the progress report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(11:30)

Ms. Junor: — So we talk about not having a plan. That's clearly not true. And when we talk about what happens in communities, we need to talk about what the communities need, not what they traditionally had because if you traditionally had a building, a hospital, a doctor, that may not be what you need. Or it might be just part of what you need.

When we talk about primary health care, it always depends on more basic needs than that. And when we're talking about how people access services, they need them closer to home. But they don't need what we traditionally have had. And, as I said before, making change is difficult. I've been involved in making change. I was the leader of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses in '93 when the conversion started, and that was difficult.

The Speaker: — I would just . . . Order please, members. Order. Order, please. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So to talk about not knowing what this means, or to go blindly forward in making decisions, is clearly untrue. Things that are being done by our government are being done informed by evidence, informed by what we want to see happen in our health system within a context of how much money do we have to spend.

And it's interesting — \$160 million in this year's budget isn't going to buy us the status quo, \$160 million isn't going to buy us the status quo. We have got to do some changes. And changes are difficult for people unless they are supported in the change by good information. And I have not seen any good information come from the Sask Party in the six years I've been here, no information that is useful for people to make decisions.

When you talk about statements out of context, half-truths, half-statements, this does not inform a public's decision. It does nothing to move us forward to a system where we could actually serve the people well. When we talk about having long waiting lists for diagnostics and for surgeries, we obviously need money in a different part of the system.

We have to make those choices. And we only have a certain amount of money, and it isn't going to be able to be spent all on health all the time, so we do have to make some choices fairly

soon. And as a responsible government, we are making those choices. Our plans are developed with the districts, and the districts represent their communities. The communities have input into that. Those decisions are made at the district level with the communities that are involved.

We need to support the districts and the communities to see that change is positive, that when we switch the money from one place to another, it does make a difference in our health outcomes which is what we all as citizens would want to see — that we all are healthy. Given the money that we spend, we deserve that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be following up my remarks for the member from Saskatoon Eastview regarding the half-truths and statements out of context, Mr. Speaker.

It appears, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is trying to make some political hay here out of a statement attributed in the press to former premier, Roy Romanow. The Saskatchewan Party motion before us says that Roy Romanow considers his actions surrounding health in the early 1990s to be a mistake.

Mr. Speaker, I have the article . . . quote from the article which is published in the Volume 67(1) *Law Review* of Saskatchewan. It's sort of the latest from what Roy Romanow would be saying, and in there Mr. Romanow says:

“Most governments had no choice but to pursue these remedies, given the harsh fiscal realities of the day, and I still support my government's approach of the time.”

This in the context of what was happening, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as for the accuracy of the Sask Party motion regarding Mr. Romanow's intentions or opinions, I would offer the following for the record in terms of newspapers and their attempts to do research through the newspapers or perhaps newspapers doing research for them. The quote that the Sask Party is using is found in the *Leader-Post*, and it's in November 14, 2003. The quote goes:

Earlier this week, Romanow said his government's decisions were based on a “false economy.” (false economy, Mr. Speaker) “We pushed the costs . . . of the government's pockets and right into the pockets of farmers . . . business people and nurses,” . . . said in a speech to . . . 300 nurses from across Canada attending . . .

Mr. Speaker, in the *The StarPhoenix*, in the *The StarPhoenix* on November 15, 2003, former Premier Roy Romanow said this. I quote:

Former premier Roy Romanow said this week his government implemented a “false economy” when it cut spending on health care (costs) because (the) costs were pushed out of the government's pockets and into the pockets of individual citizens.

That's what he said, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, November 14, 2003, Romanow said he realized that when he was still premier that his government had implemented a “false economy”. Mr. Speaker:

All you do is transfer on to . . . (a) taxpayer-voter in a different way. (Mr. Speaker) They've got to pay for it out of their own pockets other than through the progressive taxation system.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Romanow said. Now, Mr. Speaker, the context of which this is being taken and the false economy . . . and I think I would like to quote to the members opposite from a speech where the former premier was speaking to the University of Ottawa. I'll be submitting these copies of these speeches, tabling them in the legislature and perhaps they could take the time to read them. And I would, I would like to quote from one of those. And this is:

We should (talking about the shifting of costs, Mr. Speaker) We should try . . . avoid(ing) shifting costs between the publicly and privately funded sectors of the health care system. Our concern should be to control . . . costs.

Until the mid-1990s, some provincial governments — charged as they . . . (were) with the primary responsibility for the delivery of health — including my own in Saskatchewan, were successful in restraining the growth in (the) public health care costs. We rationalized our services and improved efficiencies, while trying (not always successfully) to preserve access to quality services.

It turned out, however, that we pushed some of these costs out of our own budgets and onto individual residents. This is (the) false economy (Mr. Speaker).

Because, at the end of the day, the total bill for health care is paid by citizens, whether it's through a progressive taxation system, or the personal fees they pay directly . . . (to) health services, such as premiums on insurance policies.

Mr. Speaker, the false economy that the members opposite would have read a little on this or did a bit of research referred to the trading of costs from the public medical plan to private medical insurance, Mr. Speaker. To repeat Mr. Romanow's key statement:

We should try to avoid shifting costs between the publicly and privately funded sectors of . . . health care system. Our concern should be to control total costs (Mr. Speaker).

I do not believe, Mr. Speaker, that any New Democrat would argue with that statement.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Romanow elaborates on this concept in other speeches. And I quote from another speech, Mr. Speaker, the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University:

We all know that health care costs have been soaring in recent years. But here's an interesting — and little

reported — fact:

If we were to compare cost(s) . . . in the publicly funded, privately funded, and mixed group of services I described earlier, it is the publicly funded group — hospital and physician services — that wins, hands down.

Indeed, per-capita spending on these publicly funded hospital and physician services is the same today as it was in 1991. By comparison, drug costs — which we put in the mixed public-private category — doubled in the past 25 years.

Mr. Romanow says in the same speech, “The total bill should matter more than the individual portions.”

Mr. Speaker, when governments are considering health care costs, they should always consider the total bill. In the context of the total bill for health care, governments may save money from their own budgets by pushing some services into the private sector, but a total health system becomes a loser because of the higher costs of private care.

Mr. Speaker, the true false economy being referred to by Mr. Romanow is when government pretends to save money by pushing health care and health costs into the private sector. The total bill for health care will be higher with private care even if the government gleans some budgetary savings or economy by pushing health care into the private sector, and the bill into the pockets of private citizens through the cost of private health care premiums for additional care.

Mr. Speaker, public health care has been a 60-year project for our party and our movement. It is a project which continues. From a historic perspective, the Action Plan for Health Care is the most important structural advance to health care in our province since full medicare was introduced in the 1960s. The action plan is aimed at achieving a set of objectives and commitments for the health of people of Saskatchewan that were first proposed over 60 years ago.

I draw your attention to the historical record of a set of values and policies which have evolved and guided our movement. Mr. Speaker, in the early days of the party, we find ourselves with the following:

With the advance of medical science the maintenance of a healthy population has become the function for which every (society) . . . should undertake responsibility. Health services should be made at least as freely available as . . . educational services today A properly organized system of public health services including medical and dental care, which would . . . (have stressed) the prevention rather than the cure of illness should be extended to all . . . people in both rural and urban areas.

As policies and practices have evolved, our ongoing commitment to implementing a true health plan rather than a sickness plan as outlined to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, in the early '90s, this province was on the brink of disaster. We were at times a few days away from bankruptcy, from federal trusteeship of our province. It should be

remembered at all times that there were members of the party opposite in the Devine government that drove us to the edge of bankruptcy. The Leader of the Opposition even ran for the Tory nomination in 1999, so he could carry the banner for the Devine government. The leader had worked for Mr. Devine in the legislature. If the new Leader of the Saskatchewan Party was so appalled and disillusioned by the policies of the Devine era, why did he fight to carry this banner?

Mr. Speaker, New Democrats were left to clean up the mess, the sorry mess left behind by the political formation that is our current opposition. We made the hard choices that kept our province from insolvency; some of those choices, Mr. Speaker, were painful. Mr. Speaker, this government does not back away from a challenge. We did not back away when we created hospitalization. We did not back away when we created medicare. And, Mr. Speaker, we will not back away now.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health said just the other day, we have 160 million of new money in our budget which will expand what we're doing in health care.

The Speaker: — Order please, members. I'll just ask the member from Saskatoon Fairview to continue alone.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — We'll continue to look at the practical solutions to the kind of challenges that we have in Saskatchewan. We know that there are challenges, but we know that the solutions can be found when we work with people who live in various parts of our province.

Mr. Speaker, the Health minister has also mentioned that the opposition seems to do their research, as I mentioned earlier, through the newspapers. Or in fact perhaps the research is done by the press. Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat at this time, after reviewing all the material here before me, concerned of the quality of the research appearing in the motion of the opposition. If they were in fact serious, Mr. Speaker, perhaps they should have spent some time.

But I notice, Mr. Speaker, that the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy during an earlier period of her political tenure, outlined perhaps a more rigorous approach in researching topics raised within the legislature. Mr. Speaker, may I read from the *Review* in Weyburn, October 20, 1999, after the member was appointed as Intergovernmental Affairs and deputy critic for that time.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, the rigorous approach was . . . she says her preparation for the role include talking with experienced fellow party members and doing research. Also in there is . . . on the option put forward during the course of the campaign was the privatization of health care services, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would just simply like to end with one more quote from Roy Romanow, and that is:

Friends, (friends), the Report's agenda is an ambitious one, but at a time when one of our most cherished national programs is at a crossroads . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to enter into this debate today and especially since we're discussing the issue of health care and the potential further closure of health care beds in the province of Saskatchewan, whether they are acute or heavy care beds.

Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting listening to members on the government side in the debate we've had this afternoon and their arguments for or against closures of further beds in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, might I remind this Assembly that back in the late '70s under then Premier Allan Blakeney, the NDP actually had a moratorium on acute and heavy care term bed . . . long-term care bed construction in the province of Saskatchewan, and how well did we do at that time.

And through the '80s, Mr. Speaker, some 2,400 heavy care beds were added to the system, and yet the system continued to find that there were not enough beds to meet the need. And then of course along came the 1990s and the decision for the Romanow government to look at health care and determine that we may as well close more beds, we may as well close down more hospitals because that will save some money and thereby we'll be able to meet the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

(11:45)

And much to their chagrin, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, as Mr. Romanow has already admitted, the closure of these beds, closure of 52 hospitals, the closure of the Plains health care centre certainly didn't do anything to meet the long-term health needs of Saskatchewan. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, the government talked about finding . . . through those closures saving money so that they could use that money and spread it over a broader base to meet the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan. Did they accomplish that? How well are they doing today, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan . . . And I wonder how many members over the past few weeks have even taken the time to visit in our health care facilities or to visit patients in our health care facilities, to talk to caregivers in our health care facilities to see how well the system is working today.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that even as we are seeing union leaders across this province as they begin to acknowledge the potential and the impact that health care workers may face, the government moves ahead with their intent to close more acute and long-term beds in the province of Saskatchewan. And I look at the *Leader-Post* article dated today, and it says:

Faced with the prospect of job losses in the health regions as a result of budget cuts, the union representing health care workers has postponed provincial contract negotiations until the fall.

Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Because, Mr. Speaker, they want to know what they're going to be dealing with. They want to know exactly what further downsizing and closure in the health care beds, in the health care system is going to do, not only to

meeting the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — Order members, please. Seventy-five minute debate. Room for six or eight . . . six speakers, and I'd like to hear the member for Moosomin, please.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we look at the potential for further closures — and, Mr. Speaker, don't kid yourself — there are serious decisions being made in the health regions across the province of Saskatchewan as a result of the funding that they have been given by this government to try and meet the health care needs that they have been asked to deal with. And in the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region . . . It's in the article I'm quoting from *Leader-Post*, today's *Leader-Post*. It says:

. . . there are no empty long-term care beds, according to Saskatchewan Union of Nurses President Rosalee Longmoore. "So the resources to look after these people, if beds are closed (where would they be?) . . .

Who would be providing that care to these people?

Mr. Speaker, Rosalee goes on to say:

The sense I got was that the Regina General and Pasqua wouldn't be impacted, but it would be more outside the city.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if he would say the General and the Pasqua are not going to be impacted by closures, I would beg to argue with you, yes, they will be impacted by further closure. And you say, well closures in the rural communities will not impact the large tertiary centres. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that they will have an impact because it removes those acute care beds that are being staffed by qualified professional individuals, nurses and nursing assistants and medical professionals in the rural communities, that certainly reduce the stress and the load on the large tertiary centres.

So, Mr. Speaker, if you think that people in rural Saskatchewan aren't concerned, I think you need to listen very carefully. They are concerned. They are concerned when they hear of cutbacks because they ask themselves and they ask governments, they ask my colleagues, exactly what have we accomplished through the past closures. And when we look at 52 hospitals, we look at the Plains health care centre, we ask ourselves what have we gained today.

What have we gained today? The longest surgical waiting lists, we have in the province of Saskatchewan. The longest diagnostic waiting lists especially . . . two years for MRIs in the province of Saskatchewan, horrendously long waits in emergency rooms. And, Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length to speak of the experiences of individuals, even some of my constituents, as they've been transferred to the city of Regina only to wait in emergency rooms on gurneys for up to two and three days to even be looked at because of the lack of beds and space available in large urban centres. And as a result of this, Mr. Speaker, we've seen a mass exodus of nurses and other health care professionals in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, closing more beds is not the answer. One might ask how well has the government done to date. The government continues to brag about the fact that they are putting \$2.7 billion into the health care system. That \$2.7 billion is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 40 per cent of expenditures of the Department of Finance to date, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, one has to ask how well are we doing and how well are we spending those \$2.7 billion in providing health care. Are we actually spending and utilizing those dollars to the . . . in the most efficient manner possible to meet the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan, of the residents of Saskatchewan, to address their needs.

Mr. Speaker, this motion before us this afternoon is . . . or this morning, Mr. Speaker, is talking about the fact that the people of Saskatchewan want to have some involvement. And this government and this Premier has talked about including people in the discussion, including people in debate, going out and meeting with the public and asking them for their input, asking them for their involvement, asking them for their thoughts and their views on how we spend their money.

And that's what this motion is talking about, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this motion is talking about the fact that we're asking this government to give heed to the needs of the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan, the residents of the province of Saskatchewan, as to how we provide care for them.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we wouldn't be asking for this if it wasn't for the fact that this government has done a very poor job in managing health care dollars and providing for the health care needs of the people of Saskatchewan to the point that even the former premier now acknowledges that some of the . . . many of the decisions they made certainly have not been a benefit to the people of Saskatchewan.

And as a number of members have already indicated . . . certainly in the *Leader-Post* of November 14, '03 where Mr. Romanow said — who headed the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada — he has admitted the deep cuts to provincial health care services in the 1990s were a mistake.

I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Romanow looked back at the decisions that the NDP government under Allan Blakeney in the 1970s, the decisions in regards to the moratorium on health, on expenditures of heavy-care beds and what that moratorium did to providing health care services in the province of Saskatchewan. He looked at the decisions that his government had made and their arguments that if we close these facilities and these beds, we'll find more money to provide adequate care to the people of Saskatchewan.

He looked back at all of those decisions and as he was doing his . . . As he was the head of the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, as he was sitting down and meeting with people all across this country, I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he looked back at how well he had managed the health care system in the province of Saskatchewan. And he ended up having to admit that the decisions they made certainly weren't very positive decisions and it didn't accomplish the goals that his government had desired to meet in endeavouring to reduce waiting lists, in endeavouring to give people immediate access

to the specific health needs and specialists, and access to the beds that were necessary in the O.R. (operating room) rooms to address people's health care needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I am certainly pleased to stand in support of this motion today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to enter into this debate and to put a little bit of rational talk about the whole issue of fearmongering that the opposition continues to put forward in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition continually talks about what the government's going to do and tries to raise the anxiety of senior citizens and raising the anxiety of the people of Saskatchewan about what they believe the government's going to do.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about the policy in health care, the policies that the Saskatchewan Party's put forward on health care over the years. And I'd like to start, Mr. Speaker, with their 1999 election platform where they said they would freeze spending on health care for five years. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year would be the fifth year of that five-year freeze.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they said they'd freeze health care spending for five years. Over those same five years, Mr. Speaker, this government's put more than 6 per cent a year into health care spending.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talk about all the grandiose things they would do and how they would provide all these great services to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And just how would they have done that with a five year freeze on health care spending?

Now, Mr. Speaker, they can try to create fear in seniors in the province. They can try to create fear in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. But the reality is their own plan calls for a five-year freeze on spending in health care. And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, in that five years — in that five years, Mr. Speaker — this same government's put forward more than 30 per cent of new money, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to quote for the people of Saskatchewan a number of quotations from members from the opposition over the last number of years. And I'd like to start with a quote from the member from Rosetown, the former leader of the opposition, when he was a Member of Parliament, House of Commons, and I quote. This is from the *Hansard*, House of Commons, February 15, 1994, Mr. Speaker:

I know that most Canadians place a high priority on health care. I would just like to relate a little about what is

happening in my own province of Saskatchewan. We had governments that liked to build monuments, that liked to build hospitals. We probably have more hospitals per capita in our province than . . . any other part of Canada. Unfortunately, we now have no money to operate those hospitals. Our priorities were probably wrong. In fact, I am sure they . . . (are) wrong.

That is the former leader of the opposition, February 15, 1994 in *Hansard* from the House of Commons, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So how can the opposition stand here day after day, fearmonger, tell the people of Saskatchewan that the government's going to take their grandmothers and their brothers and sisters, and take them out of nursing home beds and not provide those services in rural Saskatchewan. It's shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When their own leader, their own leader said that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote again from the member from Biggar . . . Rosetown, pardon me, when he was the leader of the opposition. And, Mr. Speaker, this was March 3, 1999, in the *Leader-Post*. It says:

Saskatchewan Party leader Elwin Hermanson couldn't guarantee his party would keep the doors open at all 36 hospitals with low average daily bed usage rates.

Mr. Speaker, here they're criticizing and telling the government that they shouldn't do something — something they proposed to do themselves. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know, when you have an opposition that wants to go out there and be all things to all people but yet when it comes down to being put in a position where they have to answer, they won't guarantee that they will keep those same hospitals open, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to quote, according to CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) reporter Art Jones on February 3, 2000, Health critic Rod Gantefoer couldn't guarantee that the Saskatchewan Party wouldn't shut down rural hospitals. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's Rod Gantefoer, their Health critic saying that — on CBC radio, February 3, 2000, saying he wouldn't guarantee he'd keep those health facilities open, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know what the members opposite are trying to do. But the members opposite go and they tell people in rural Saskatchewan what they want to hear, and they come here and say other things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's very, very unfortunate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on February 3, CBC, a quote again from the opposition:

All along the opposition has been saying . . . (that) health care system . . . (shouldn't) be studied before there are any more hospitals closed. And even though the Saskatchewan Party is blasting the government for not guaranteeing the future of rural hospitals, it's not prepared to do so itself.

Again, a quote from CBC, February 3, 2000, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think this is the absolute best quote, Mr. Speaker. The absolute best quote. It is from the Moosomin . . . the *World-Spectator* from Moosomin, November 10, 2003, just days, just days after the provincial election, Mr. Speaker. And it says this, and this is a direct quote, Mr. Speaker:

Toth said any voters in Moosomin who were concerned about the status of the new health care facility under a Sask Party government should be relieved.

They should be relieved, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I guess they should be relieved because a New Democratic Party government was returned in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is terrific, it is exceptional when the opposition will go out there and say — and say and put in writing, Mr. Deputy Speaker — that the seniors of our province are better off under an NDP government in Saskatchewan.

(12:00)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a number of other quotes I'd like to raise. I'd like to talk about a quote from the *Leader-Post*, April 4, 1998, from then Saskatchewan Party leader, Elwin Hermanson. And it says:

Saskatchewan should be raising additional revenue by removing some procedures for 'non-life threatening illnesses' from the medicare plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this the party that says you . . . (inaudible) . . . remove procedures from the medicare plan that Saskatchewan citizens need. And they're out there creating, creating fear among Saskatchewan seniors and rural residents about the potential of closing health care facilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to end my remarks by talking about the plans of some members of the Saskatchewan Party, and I'd like refer to the *Weyburn Review*, October 20, 1999:

Weyburn-Big Muddy MLA Brenda Bakken has also voiced support for private health care. One option put forward by Bakken during the course of her campaign was the privatization of health services (Mr. Speaker).

We should trust a party who wants to privatize those health services, Mr. Speaker. Not in this province.

Then Bakken also stated:

Why are we not looking at having privatized care in Saskatchewan and keeping the money here if that's what we're going to do?

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — There will now be a 10-minute question and comment period. I recognize the member for

Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question's for the member from Eastview. And I'd like to know what that member thinks Tommy Douglas would say about this NDP government cutting long-term care beds and chasing our seniors into private care homes and creating even a larger two-tier system in this province. What does she think Tommy Douglas would have to say about that?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, failing having a séance, I have really no idea.

But I think that what we need to talk about is what do people in Saskatchewan expect of their government? They expect us to make choices that will improve their health care. And we can't simply say, we keep what we have and keep adding more money. We have to change what we have that isn't working or isn't serving us well, or has served us well and no longer is needed. Those are the choices that we have to make and, as governments, that's what we do.

We have our health plan. We have the progress on our health plan and we will continue to work with our districts and our communities to make sure that what we put in place serves the people of Saskatchewan well so that we are healthy.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question's for the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy. Could the member deny or confirm for me that Sask Party MLAs and/or staff have held discussions with representatives of the Alberta government concerning amendments to the Canada Health Act and privatization of health services?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — As far as I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no.

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

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Saskatoon Eastview. She refers to the action plan on health care. I'm looking at the document, and does the action plan on health care contain any reference to conversions of facilities or closures of beds or closures of entire facilities? If so, what page is the reference on? I'm looking at the table of contents, and I'm looking at the highlights, and I find no reference to closures or conversions in the document.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The action plan for health care is a dynamic document. There are things that we will see that have to have change as we move along in our

health system and in our response to the people's needs in the province.

When the member from across the way asked me about Tommy Douglas, Tommy Douglas was about change. Tommy Douglas talked about change. He's the one who brought us to the change in how we have our health system delivered and who pays for it. That's why we have medicare, because he was interested in change. It wasn't easy to move that change forward, but he did it. So we continue to move forward in change that will actually respect and respond to the needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

The document that the member is questioning is, like I said, a document that is continually evolving. It will always be something that responds to the needs of our province.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The member from Weyburn-Big Muddy and her accounts of Mr. Romanow . . . or speaking on behalf of Mr. Romanow's . . . or being an expert on Mr. Romanow's speeches, would the member please comment on what she thought of Mr. Romanow's comments regarding formative change and determinants of health?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not believe that Mr. Romanow ever indicated in any information that I have that he was in favour of closing hospitals, closing beds, or closing long-term care beds and throwing our seniors out of their homes and with nowhere to go.

I would like to refer to Rosalee Longmoore quote that is in the paper today where she indicates that, and I quote: "So the . . . (resource) to look after these people, if beds are closed, would be where?" Because, "there are no empty long-term care beds . . ." in Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region.

So we would like to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where the NDP plan to put the seniors of our province when they throw them out of their long-term care beds?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the member from Saskatoon Fairview, who in his dissertation spent a lot of time going back to the '80s, forgot to go back to Allan Blakeney's 6.8 billion which by the way we still haven't paid off. We still haven't paid that off.

However then he went a little more modern, and he talked . . . tried to do a defence of Roy Romanow's closing of 52 hospitals. So then he got near the end of his dissertation, and he says we have to make decisions or have to make decisions by evidence. By evidence — that's what the member for Saskatoon Fairview says.

So I ask him, how much did the NDP save by Mr. Romanow closing 52 hospitals? And for the people watching, if he can't answer that specifically, that means there is no answer which means they have no idea how much they are going to save by closing the hospitals this time around.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, the changes outlined in the action plan and the changes this government is proposing are for the benefits of the people of Saskatchewan. Those changes, those changes that we propose and the changes that were done were for the benefit of the health care system, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the . . . whatever may be said on that point, we did those changes because they were the right changes. They were the tough decisions we had to make, and we were there. And we will continue to be there for the public health care system, unlike the members from the other side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy. Mr. Speaker, my question is, what is her position on privatized health care in the province of Saskatchewan? And what does she feel about amendments to the Canada Health Act that would allow privatized health care in Canada?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Saskatchewan Party supports publicly funded, publicly administered health care in accordance with the Canada Health Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is to the member from Eastview. Your Premier stated that there was no benefit in additional closures to hospitals, that the \$12 million savings was not significant to offset the closures. Do you support that position?

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What we're talking about here is a plan for the health of this province of Saskatchewan. What we have is not necessarily what we need. What we have now is not necessarily what we need tomorrow. When we talk about making a plan, we talk about looking forward and seeing what we do and that what we will do will

make a difference in the health of the people of Saskatchewan.

And we're not talking about throwing people out on the street out of their long-term care beds. We're looking at a broader vision of what do we need to serve the people of Saskatchewan. Where do we need it? And who actually should be providing those services? That's the thing that we do as a government when we make a plan. We don't look at those tiny little specifics like the opposition want to make sure that we focused in on and fearmonger with people that are going to be put out of their beds. That's not what's going to be happening. We're looking at a plan in a broader sense, in a long-term sense, of what, how, and where we deliver the services that the people of Saskatchewan need.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter the comment portion of this.

I really have to smile when I see opposition members quoting and talking about how great Roy Romanow is and how great Allan Blakeney is, and I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we think they are great, great Canadians. They continue to contribute to the fabric of Saskatchewan and Canada particularly as it relates to health. We want to talk about our leaders, our politicians.

It's interesting that today when in the *Leader-Post* it says, "Devine expected to run," they're silent about their political heritage. I'd be silent too if I was on that side. I wouldn't want to talk about Grant Devine either. I'd want to talk about Roy Romanow, Allan Blakeney and the great Canadians that have built medicare in this wonderful country of ours.

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

Mr. Brkich: — My question is for the member from Regina Dewdney. He'd mentioned about fearmongering out there. Does that mean that . . . with that statement I believe that he means that there will be no long-term care bed closures because in my constituency, in my health district, the two that come into my area, there are no empty long-term care beds. There's waiting lists right now in Imperial of 10.

So that I will ask the member opposite, does he support long-term care bed closures in this province, or does he support closures of facilities or long-term care beds? And if he does, where will these people go because in my health districts there is no place for them to go?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thanks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'll tell the member opposite what I don't support. I don't support fearmongering. I don't support getting seniors upset and excited about things that aren't going to happen. I don't support getting people angry, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. That concludes the 75-minute debate.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

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

Motion No. 3 — Government's Commitment to Rural Saskatchewan

Mr. Borgerson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to put forward this motion to the Assembly.

I'd like to start off by indicating, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it's seeding time in Saskatchewan. And so before I speak directly to the motion, I would like to acknowledge and honour the work of our farm population past and present and the great challenges they have faced — in our grandparents' day, our parents' day, and today, as I watched my sister and brother and their families face many of the same challenges and new ones as well — on their Saskatchewan farms.

This is the season of hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Stan Rogers wrote a song once which had these lyrics:

Watch the field behind the plow turn to straight dark rows
Put another season's promise in the ground

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the season of hope. This is the season of seeding. And so many farmers today are out in the fields, and we wish them well in their work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Borgerson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also the weekend of Mother's Day and I would . . .

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

Mr. Borgerson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can see that the members opposite are in a very good mood as we approach the weekend and as attentive as usual.

And so I'd like to acknowledge the farm women who have contributed to this province and to this economy and, in recognition of that, acknowledge my own mother, Leila Borgerson, who usually celebrates Mother's Day at the same time as her birthday. As the member from Saskatoon Eastview said, our mothers are never far from the centre of our universe. And I certainly feel that at this time as my mother goes through a difficult time in her life.

It reminds me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of a little bit of a story that I might share with the Assembly. After my father passed away, when my mother decided to move into a seniors' apartment complex, I spoke to the manager of that complex. And the manager indicated that when senior citizens moved in there, they usually requested the third floor, which puzzled me greatly because that meant dealing with stairs and elevators and that

sort of a thing. So I asked, well why, why on earth would they want to stay on the third floor? And the manager responded, they want to be able to look out over the prairie, and they want to be able to see the elevators. And the big item there was to be able to see the elevators, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(12:15)

And so at this time of the year, I'm thinking about farming and thinking about my family and thinking about Mother's Day and thinking about the symbols that represent this province and represent rural Saskatchewan. And one of the symbols that has always I guess traditionally represented this place are the grain elevators that used to, at one time, be right across this province and right across Western Canada.

There's been great changes in the rural landscape over the last 20, 30, 50 years. At one time in the '30s, there were 5,700 elevators across Western Canada, and there are 600 today. So we are living in a very different world, and it's compounded by all kinds of problems including BSE, drought.

I was talking to some of the other members in this House recently, and we talked about how the snow that we accumulated over the winter, which seemed to be a great snowfall, snow cover, has in fact disappeared very quickly. And there is concern that in fact we will once again have dry conditions in this province. And so all of us hope that we'll have the moisture that's needed to sustain the farm families, the family farms in this province. But out of all of this, this has always been a province of hope. And it's always been a next year country, that things will be better. We'll hang in and things will get better.

One of the members opposite last week, when we were talking about the Canadian Wheat Board, said that this is a different world, and I acknowledge that. It is a very different world now. The member opposite — the member from Kindersley — indicated that 20 per cent of the farmers in this province are farming 80 per cent of the land. That has then made a significant change to the rural landscape in this province. So there has been rural depopulation, smaller towns, and an inability to sustain many services — post offices, schools, and hospitals. And there are small, tiny little communities in this province . . . Well not communities, there are places in this province where there are signposts for the little villages and hamlets, but there's no one living there. There's been a dramatic change in the landscape of this province.

And why has this occurred? Well there are many, many reasons. The member from Wood River would say it's years and years of socialism, not realizing of course that we haven't had a socialist government in Ottawa ever.

There have been economic forces — globalization and deregulation — that have contributed to it in a great, great way. And there have been federal policies I think that have . . . federal policies that have contributed directly to what, what we have experienced in this province.

And when I think of those federal policies, I think of the abandonment of the Crow rate, which I think was a signpost, a signal from the government that in fact farm families were

going to be on their own. The effect of the removal of the Crow rate resulted in increased freight rates, leaving farmers wide open to the open market in what some people have described as in a situation of survival of the fittest.

There have been trade agreements that our federal government have signed that I think have put added pressure on the farmers of this province — the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the general agreement on trades and tariffs; NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), a free trade agreement — and what some people have described as a one-way free trade situation for this province and for the farmers here.

There's been a drastic change in the trade subsidies. In the mid-1980s the Canadian government subsidized the farmers of this province at an equal level, at an equal level to Europeans and Americans. That has changed dramatically. These figures are three or four years old, but Europe now subsidizes their farmers to the tune of \$90 billion — \$6 a bushel. Americans subsidize their farmers to the tune of \$28 billion or 2.75 a bushel. Canadian subsidies, 600 million to the tune of 44 cents a bushel.

And so we here in Saskatchewan wait for this issue to be addressed for the rural people of this province, that trade injury be dealt with at the federal level. And in the meantime, and in the meantime the farmers of this province carry on.

People in this government wait for fair trade, fair trade for the producers of this province. And this government supports the Canadian Wheat Board which puts every year \$142 million into the pockets of Saskatchewan farmers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Borgerson: — This is where we stand as a government. The National Farmers Union last fall put out a paper that was very interesting and persuasive with good research behind it, and the title of the paper is *The Farm Crisis, Bigger Farms, and the Myths of "Competition" and "Efficiency."*

The first two myths are the myths that farmers need to become more efficient, and the bigger they are the more efficient they will be. Over and over again, that is the same message that we have received from the federal government and from other interests.

A 1969 federal task force recommended, recommended that half to two-thirds of farmers should be moved out of agriculture. It went on to say, increased mobility out of farming helps to achieve a higher per capita net farm income for those left in farming, while at the same time obtaining better paid employment for those who leave agriculture. This kind of a message was repeated over and over again in reports — federal Agriculture reports 1981, 1993 — this idea that the solution lies in higher competition and higher efficiency and fewer but larger farms.

Well the irony, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this: that over the past 25 years prices haven't changed for farmers. Farmers are essentially producing their grains, oilseeds, hogs, cattle, and other foods at pretty much the same prices as 25 years ago. In

the meantime, they have tripled yields from 1950 to 1980 — tripled yields — and they've continued to increase since then.

So it is the pressure of low prices that farmers face. And they're squeezed from the other direction by high inputs — chemicals and fertilizers. From 1947 to 1997, in those 50 years, those inputs quadrupled. The price of tractors quintupled. It's indicated that if inputs were reduced by 15 per cent — by 15 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the net income of farmers would double. So there is a myth of efficiency that the National Farmers Union raises — this idea that the solution lies in farmers becoming more efficient and becoming bigger.

Interestingly though, we are living in a world of corporate concentration. When I grew up in the small town of Rockglen, I can remember farm equipment dealers all through the town. There were, in this country and on this continent, many different beef processors.

Things have changed. The five farm equipment companies that I remember have been reduced to two. There are two primary beef processors, three pasta, and five grain companies from the very many that we used to have at one time. And corporations have begun a process I think to control the profit from the business of food, from the seed to the shelf and from the gate to the plate.

In the face of all of this farmers have done everything that they've been asked to do and more. They have larger farms. A large farm when I was . . . Well the farm that I grew up on was about, was five quarters and that now would be a small farm. So farmers have become larger; they have diversified. And I would say farmers have been creative, determined, and courageous in the face of many situations that are beyond their control, the weather, BSE, and in fact federal policies that have not assisted them, and an age of the open market and globalization that I think has transformed the rural landscape.

So what to do? In this province, we realize that the family farm is the heartbeat of this place that we call home. And so we support programs that support farmers — 55 million for BSE programs, crop insurance which will again be fully funded, a minimum commitment of 99 million for CAIS (Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program). And remembering always the constraints that this province is under, that for every amount of money put into the farm situation, we have to contribute 40 per cent. So this is the situation that farmers face in this province, and I applaud and I think we all applaud the strength and determination of farmers in responding to it.

So here is my story. This is what I see as I go around Saskatchewan, that this is how difficult and how challenging it has been for farm country and for the communities, the towns and villages around this province; what's happening out there.

I have three different routes to take when I come to Regina. And every time I drive down here I'm quite amazed — given the size of this province and the infrastructure that we have to support — I'm amazed at the quality of the roads, the highways that I travel. I have miles and miles and miles of grid roads and secondary roads in my constituency which I've come to know very well, and I am amazed and astounded at the maintenance and the quality of the roads that I travel there.

Of course everyone in their constituencies has that one or two little grid roads or little bit of pavement that they'd like patched, but for the most part I'm impressed with the transportation system that we have in rural Saskatchewan and which I've come to know very well as I've grown up in the South, lived in the North, and presently serve an area of central Saskatchewan.

I have visited the schools in my constituency and this is what I see there. In little schools like Spruce Home and Red Wing — there were students here this week from Red Wing, Christopher Lake — I see well-equipped schools and well-built schools. I see teacher aides and assistants working with those kids who require extra help — the special needs students in our schools. I see an amazing degree of computer hardware and software and computer support for students.

It's interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, last fall before the election, my job was to supervise intern teachers. And it was quite remarkable for, in terms of the interns' evaluations, that their co-operating teachers could go on-line with a password, write the evaluations. Using their password with their permission, I could go in and read it and make suggestions as to the changes that they could make to those evaluations which they would work on in the schools. It was a remarkable situation.

There is more and more high-speed Internet in the schools. CommunityNet has webbed this province together. There have been 880 . . . 880 of the 880 Saskatchewan schools, including 85 First Nation schools have been connected; 30 regional colleges facilities have been connected; 310 of 310 health facilities have been connected; 256 of 256 government offices have been connected; 154 of 162 provincial libraries have been connected. CommunityNet is available in 366 communities and SaskTel offers high-speed Internet service in 237 communities and the number is rising.

Web-based resources have been developed by Saskatchewan Learning in partnership with school divisions, and I've had the opportunity to visit the work of students in my constituency who have participated in grassroots projects in the classroom and have put them up on the Web. The grassroots project has involved 73 school divisions since 1998, 40,000 students, 2,500 teachers, and 3,300 classrooms, and the numbers rise.

(12:30)

So we have great technical support to the students and parents and teachers in rural Saskatchewan. I'm familiar with the Evergreen Curriculum, which is accessible to all teachers and all schools in the province and rural Saskatchewan, and it has provided a valuable resource for those people.

Teachers in schools in rural Saskatchewan have taken the adaptive dimension of the curriculum and have done wonderful things. A science unit in the North might deal with grain harvesting . . . sorry, wild rice harvesting, and in the South, grain harvesting, but the students are taught the same skills.

Local history projects in the schools as well. I've spoken earlier of the local history project in Prince Albert, which I read in the paper this week has led to the possibility of that Kestapinihik — and I promise I won't sing the song — that Kestapinihik

may in fact may become the name for the P.A. riverside authority. And as has been pointed out earlier today, we have school patrollers not only in urban Saskatchewan but right across the province in our rural schools as well.

But most important, what I see in our rural schools is an incredible presence of volunteers and parents. No matter what school I've gone in to, sometimes when I walk down the hall I just never know whether I'm meeting a teacher or a parent, there is such a presence there of the community. And I'm thinking of communities like Smeaton and Christopher Lake.

I have a brother-in-law who lives in the south end of this province and he went to a volleyball tournament once. And there were some people up from the United States, I believe from North Carolina. And they were astounded at the volunteer support that this province has. They said, we might have had that kind of volunteer involvement 20, 30 years ago, but you'd never see it now. But we have that in this province, and you'll see it in rural Saskatchewan, and you'll see it in the schools.

And so to sum this up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have quality education in rural Saskatchewan. We have schools and curriculum to be proud of.

Recently I met with the CEO (chief executive officer) and the board Chair of the Cumberland Regional College in Nipawin. And I was very impressed with the facility and the programs that they run there. As with most regional colleges, they run basic ed, technical-vocational, university, and non-credit business and industry and community education programs. Their courses are offered face to face, but also they have courses on-line, and they have televised courses as well. In this province, there are 125 televised courses in 2003-2004. Our 8 regional colleges in 40 locations employ approximately 400 full-time equivalents and have an economic impact of \$128.8 million.

We have an incredible provincial library system in rural Saskatchewan. When I was young — many, many years ago — even back then we would request books from the provincial library, and I can still remember the brown envelopes arriving with the orders that we'd made. We still have a wonderful provincial library system funded municipally and provincially: ten public library systems — seven in the South, as well as Regina, Saskatoon, and the North. We have a total of 320 branch and community libraries in this province. It's an interesting statistic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have approximately 1 million people in this province, and I read that over 50 per cent of those people hold library cards and that there's a circulation of 11 million every year.

And the final area that I'd like to talk about before leaving other topics to the Minister of Agriculture, who will second this motion, is to talk about the Crowns and their presence in rural Saskatchewan.

SaskPower serves 67,000 farm customers, over 34,000 rural residential customers. They employ 550 people. The 2003 wages amount to \$28 million. SaskPower has put 200 million into capital projects in rural Saskatchewan in 2003.

SaskEnergy serves 325,000 customers; 826 employees work

there in 56 communities. They provide sponsorships — 1,300 sponsorships to 270 communities in this province. They provide scholarships, and they are rated by the Conference Board of Canada as one of Canada's most socially responsible companies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Borgerson: — SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), Mr. Deputy Speaker, employs over 1,500 employees in 13 different communities, and they utilize over 290 independent insurance brokers. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have difficult challenges in rural Saskatchewan, but as well we have a great legacy of services that this province provides for the people of Saskatchewan.

Sask Housing Corporation supports approximately 4,800 affordable housing units in 128 rural communities across this province. They provide reasonably priced rental accommodation for low- and moderate-income families and individuals. And many rural communities would not have any rental accommodation for low- to moderate-income households if this housing was not available to those who need it.

And lastly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SaskTel — SaskTel employs 3,700 people in 60 communities with a total salary of \$200 million.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've talked about, particularly about the areas of Learning or education and Crowns, and I've touched on the infrastructure that is provided to the people of rural Saskatchewan.

But I'd like to close with a little story. It's a little joke actually. And the test of the joke is that the members present have to provide the punchline.

And the story goes like this. There was once a man who decided to write a history of churches in Canada. And he thought the best way to do that would be to get right down on the ground and travel right across this country and visit churches as he went. So he started in Newfoundland. And he went into a church, and he saw on the wall the most unusual thing. He saw a golden telephone with a sign beside it that said, direct line to heaven — \$10,000. Now I would warn that members present that if you know this story, don't shout out the punchline before I get to it.

Well he thought that was unusual, so he talked to a church official and he said, why would you have this, a golden telephone and a sign that says — \$10,000, direct line to heaven? And the church official said this, the church official said, well it is exactly as it says. I can tell you that if you submit \$10,000, you will have a direct line to heaven.

So he carried on. He got to Nova Scotia. And again in a little church in Nova Scotia, he found a golden telephone with a sign that said, direct line to heaven — \$10,000. And he got exactly the same response from a church official there. And he went to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. And he moved across the country — Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba. He actually jumped over Saskatchewan and visited the territories and BC (British Columbia) and Alberta before he got here. But in every

province and territory of this country, he would find one church where there would be a golden telephone with a sign beside it that said, direct line to heaven — \$10,000.

When he got to Saskatchewan, as he travelled around, he visited a small church in a small rural community and — low and behold — he found a golden telephone on the wall with a sign that said, direct line to heaven — 25 cents. And he was astounded by this, so he called over the church official. He said, everywhere else I've gone it's been a direct line to heaven — \$10,000. Why here is a direct line to heaven 25 cents?

An Hon. Member: — SaskTel.

Mr. Borgerson: — And the response was not SaskTel. The response was, here it's a local call, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Borgerson: — And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to move:

That this Assembly commend the government for its ongoing commitment to rural Saskatchewan in areas such as agricultural support, highways, infrastructure, and education.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Moved by the member for Saskatchewan Rivers, seconded by the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley:

That this Assembly commend the government for its ongoing commitment to rural Saskatchewan in areas such as agricultural support, highways, infrastructure, and education.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to have an opportunity to rise and speak to this motion. And I have to say that I feel very honoured to be the Agriculture minister in Saskatchewan at this time. And I also have to say that I think it is a specific honour to have that position as an urban person. And I know that I bring a different perspective to the ministry, and I hope that that perspective will help and develop the ministry of Agriculture during this time.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we get the message across this province, particularly in urban Saskatchewan, as to the significance of rural Saskatchewan to urban Saskatchewan. And that includes agriculture. But it also includes the rural communities and the contributions that they make to Saskatchewan.

So I would like to go just through some of the major elements of the contribution that rural Saskatchewan, and particularly agriculture, makes to the economy and to the livelihood of Saskatchewan.

The agriculture sector in Saskatchewan is a very, very significant part of our economy. Our farmers purchase more than \$5.7 billion worth of input goods and services annually — more than \$5.7 billion worth. In the 1997-2001 period, the agricultural sector accounted for 8.7 per cent of the province's gross domestic product, dropping back to 2 billion in 2001; 7.1 per cent of the provincial GDP (gross domestic product), and 1.5 billion in 2002, which is 5.5 per cent. The reason, of course, for these drops were because of those very, very difficult drought years. But imagine, even in those times, the significance of rural Saskatchewan's contribution to the economy of Saskatchewan as a whole.

Agriculture directly accounts for about 10.5 per cent of the employed labour force in Saskatchewan — about 51,000 jobs in 2002. And indirectly, it is responsible for many, many other jobs throughout this province. Approximately 40 per cent — approximately 40 per cent of all jobs in this province are either directly or indirectly related to agriculture.

The health of the agriculture industry, as we have seen over these last few years, does affect everyone in this province. Sometimes it takes a little while for that effect to be noticed, but it very definitely affects everyone. The link between a thriving and prosperous agriculture and food sector and a thriving and prosperous urban sector in Saskatchewan cannot be overstated. Nineteen per cent of the consumer spending by rural dwellers is carried out in Regina and Saskatoon — 19 per cent.

Twenty-eight per cent of rural dwellers' consumer spending is done in the eight next largest cities, communities in Saskatchewan; Estevan, Lloydminster, Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Prince Albert, Swift Current, Weyburn, Yorkton. So you can see how important rural Saskatchewan is to urban Saskatchewan.

(12:45)

In 2002, the value of agriculture and food exports was \$4 billion, representing 35 per cent of Saskatchewan's exports, and we are an exporting province. I want to say that that is primarily around processed product, and so we want to take a look at all of the other exports that agriculture is related to directly and indirectly as well, Mr. Speaker. And I think of the varieties of agricultural equipment that have been invented, developed, and are manufactured here in this province, and also contribute greatly to our balance of trade and to our exports.

Approximately 300 food and beverage processing establishments in Saskatchewan since 2002 mean that much of this province is dependent on processing of food. An increase of over 200 per cent from 1991, there were 143 firms in '91. Food processors today employ over 7,000 people in Saskatchewan with an annual payroll of about \$227 million. Again, Mr. Speaker, it cannot be overstated how important the agriculture sector in rural Saskatchewan is to the well-being of the whole province.

A major centre of agricultural biotechnology in Canada is at our Innovation Place. And that Innovation Place is well known throughout the world. The biotechnology sector in the province employs 1,500 workers including scientists, technicians, sales, and manufacturing personnel — salaries there totalling over 40

million ... \$43 million. There are at least 30 agri-food biotechnology and related companies with more than \$400 million in sales. That's up from 5.4 million in '91, and 91 million in '98.

In 2001, there were 62 agricultural implement manufacturing establishments in Saskatchewan with sales of \$425 million. That's up from 130 in 1991. Those manufacturers employ 2,580 persons with total salaries and wages of over \$90 million.

Mr. Speaker, it cannot — cannot — be overstated how important rural Saskatchewan is and the agriculture sector is to the well-being of this province as a whole. A major portion of the value-added processors, biotechnology institutions, and manufacturing establishments are located in Saskatchewan's urban centres.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the kind of supports that this government puts into the agriculture sector, there is very, very good reason why we do it. There are times when people in urban Saskatchewan complain about the vast dollars that are put into the agriculture sector. We are far and above any other province in Canada in terms of our per capita amount that we put into support programs in agriculture and, Mr. Speaker, I think that when we talk about how important rural Saskatchewan is to urban Saskatchewan, the urban members on the other side should listen instead of making a lot of noise. I think it would help them to understand.

Mr. Speaker, in order to get a clear sense of how to most effectively put funding into rural Saskatchewan, this government developed a group called the Action Committee on the Rural Economy. Many other people got together — ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy), chambers of commerce, Agrivision — they've made a case in this province that we can shift to livestock production into a higher value of production because there have been so many changes in this province.

The member from Saskatchewan Rivers alluded to the change in this province when the federal government took away the Crow rate. It took \$300 million out of our economy annually, and the most conservative estimate. But, Mr. Speaker, the people in this province have responded. These groups have got together. We have worked with them and we realize that it is vitally important to this province to begin to develop the beef and the pork sectors to a greater extent in this province. And we have been working to that end, Mr. Speaker.

A livestock-based agriculture sector that produces enough animals to attract the state-of-the-art processing plants that will be competitive on the world market over the long term will dramatically increase the value-added activity in our economy. And, Mr. Speaker, that will mean more jobs and more wealth in this province for all people, urban Saskatchewan included.

There have been many trends and issues that we have been monitoring and that we have been working on over these years. Saskatchewan's agriculture industry continues to evolve. Our farmers and our entrepreneurs have become adept at capitalizing on opportunity in spite of successive challenges that have become a part of the very nature of agriculture in Saskatchewan. The adage that change is constant definitely

holds true for agriculture. In fact change and innovation is what defines Saskatchewan's agriculture sector, unlike many other agriculture jurisdictions where change is discouraged by government policies.

So, Mr. Speaker, recognizing that change, we have invested over many years in agricultural innovation, in the development of new cereals, and we have seen many changes over those years. The long-term trend we find is towards lower cereal grain prices. The economic impact of increased farm size, there are fewer farm families, declining rural population — these have created a compelling case for more development of a very different agriculture sector in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a growing consensus that a move in Saskatchewan towards livestock-based agricultural economy would realize opportunities to increase the value of our total primary production and to capture more economic development in slaughter and secondary manufacturing.

Mr. Speaker, our policies are moving us in this direction. The investments that we are making in agriculture in this province are moving us in this direction. Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization has worked very hard with our partners, our rural partners, to facilitate change in the industry.

I want to talk briefly about the hog industry. Hog producers are having and have had a very difficult situation for several reasons now. A 20 per cent increase in the value of the Canadian dollar against the US (United States) dollar has caused problems for the hog industry. High hog slaughter numbers in the US, due to increased US marketings and higher Canadian exports, means that packing plants are near maximum capacity which always puts downward pressure on the prices.

Lower pork consumption in Canada because of the increased support for the beef industry . . . And I think it's admirable that all of our consumers in this province — the urban consumers — got there behind the beef producers and bought beef over these last few years. It's been very important but it has had an impact on the hog industry.

Well fortunately we're beginning to see a rise in prices but some of our hog producers are struggling. And so, Mr. Speaker, we invest in the hog producers and we are extending the repayment period for the hog loans to help them through this difficult time.

Now BSE has had an incredibly difficult impact on the beef industry in this nation and in this province. We are the second largest producer of beef in the country and it hit hard. The BSE situation was the dominant issue in agriculture in 2003 and it nailed people very hard. Mr. Speaker, in the BSE area, as has been said many times, we put forward 55 million provincial dollars to help meet the need and to meet the problems in this crisis. And we have done that, Mr. Speaker. We have been there for our agricultural producers.

Mr. Speaker, we are beginning to see a change. The market is starting to open up a bit; some of the steers are selling and prices are coming up a bit as well. We are very, very hopeful that the borders will open soon and that we will see a scientific base for border openings.

So, Mr. Speaker, I see that we're getting close to the end of the day and I just want to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, the dollars that this province has and is continuing to put into agriculture. We would like to be able to put in all of the dollars that are needed, Mr. Speaker, but we are dependent on the federal government as well.

And when we see the 60/40 programs and we see the amount that that has drawn out of our treasury, we know that there can be a more equitable division across this country. And we are working to that end with the federal government. We will be working with the other provincial Agriculture ministers to try and make sure that we can get the best, most equitable programs so that we can give full support to our producers and will not have to pro-rate on the programs to the value of the amount of the dollar that we can put together today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say one more time that in this province, what we put into the agriculture sector is far, far and above the nearest province in terms of what it puts in. It is more, I believe more than three times more than what they put in in Prince Edward Island, more than three times more per capita . . . And on a per capita base, Mr. Speaker, on a per capita base, way more — way more — than they put in in the opposition's beloved Alberta.

We are there for our producers, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to, for the edification of the members opposite if they will listen for half a second, I will explain to them that Prince Edward Island puts the second amount . . . puts the second most per capita in the whole of this nation. Why? Because, Mr. Speaker, their agriculture sector, their agriculture sector in relationship to their population is like ours, Mr. Speaker. It is a huge sector with a small population.

But, Mr. Speaker, we put in more than Alberta. We put in more than Ontario. We put in more than British Columbia per capita, Mr. Speaker — over \$500 per capita. Every man, woman, and child in this province — over \$500 per capita goes into agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, we are putting more money in this year. Why? We've added to the money that is going in because there is need, Mr. Speaker. Last year we put \$130 million over budget — over budget — into agriculture. And Mr. Speaker, if there is need, we will put more in this year. Why? Because the . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order please, members. I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I see that the members opposite are certainly in need of more information and more good news about this province. And so I'd like to quote one of their favourite sources, Mr. Speaker, Murray Mandryk. And Murray is not often the source of good news, and he admits that in this column that he wrote in the *Herbert Herald*. But here, Mr. Speaker, looking at the rural Saskatchewan and the rural economy, even Murray had to admit that there were a number

of very, very positive signs out there.

So he starts off, and he gives the top 10. Mr. Speaker, I'll start with number 10.

Number 10 (good news in rural Saskatchewan): "Culture, fitness abound in rural communities" — Signs of vitality are sprouting up all through rural Saskatchewan as communities like Meacham, Creelman, Lacadena and Elrose are turning theatre, art, music and writing to either fund-raise or improve the quality of local life. Meanwhile, fitness activity also appears to be on the rise in small town Saskatchewan as gyms are springing up in Assiniboia, Canora, Carnduff, Esterhazy, Martensville, Meadow Lake, Moosomin and Unity.

Also, entrepreneurial classes are being held in the school curriculum, Mr. Speaker, because there will be new businesses developing in rural Saskatchewan.

Number 9 (Mr. Mandryk says): "New uses for old crops" — Flax as a bio-based source of fibre is now being evaluated by processors and the initial assessments are showing (incredible) promise.

Number Eight: "New technology harnesses . . . (great) power" — From using canola oil as a diesel fuel additive to processing (from) methane from manure to generate power, people are finding new sources of green power in rural Saskatchewan.

I'll make . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, it now being past the hour of 1 o'clock . . . And before I adjourn the House, I would wish everyone a safe weekend and an opportunity to pay a little respect to the mothers in your . . . and the mothers in your families and in your lives.

With that the House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.

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