



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

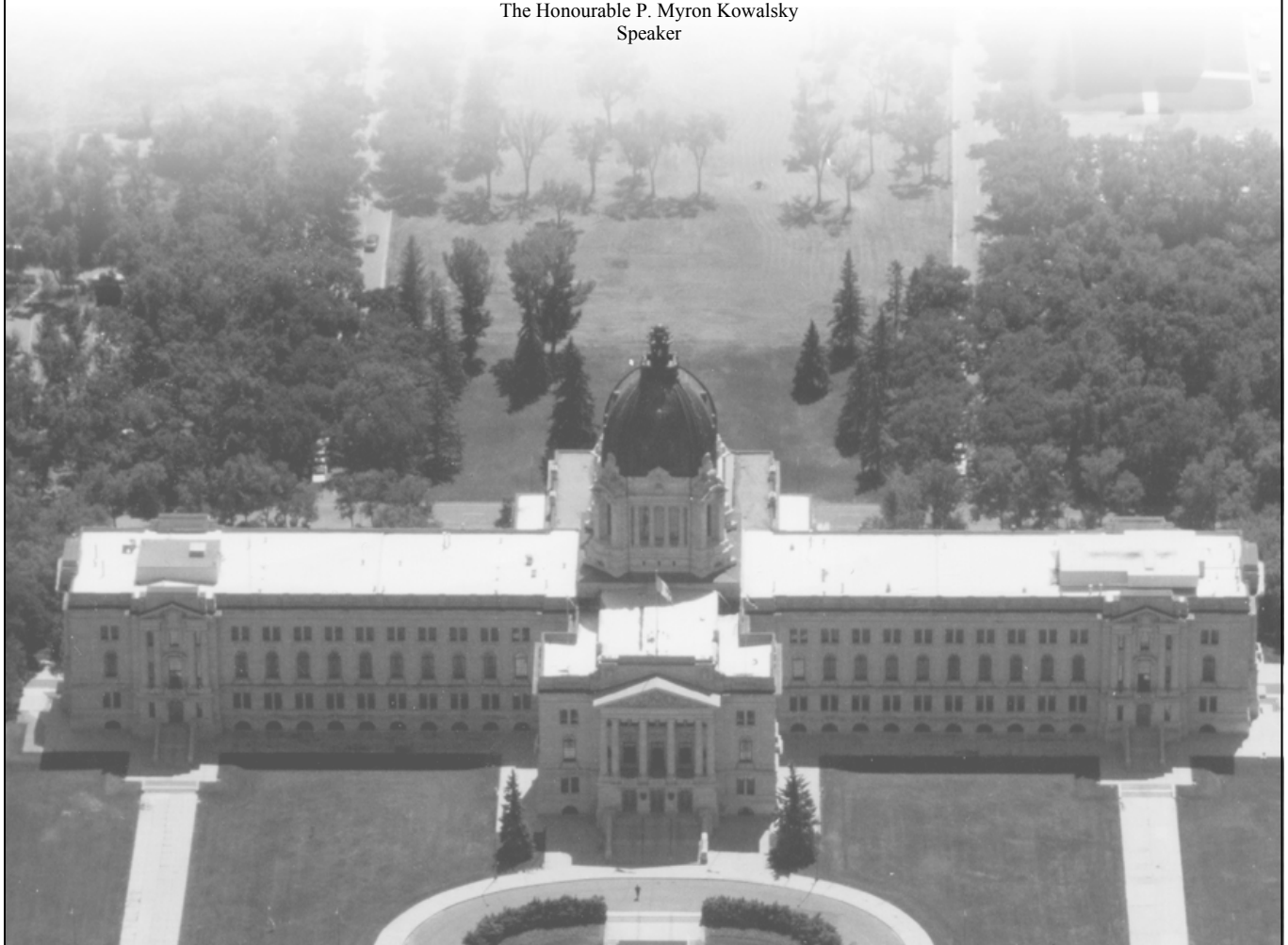
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**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 Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present petitions on behalf of constituents from the community of Gull Lake, who the other night had a number of people sign. And I wish to read the prayer:

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 Gull Lake Health Centre and special care home is not closed or further downsized.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of residents of this province concerned about the future of the Porcupine Carragana Hospital.

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 Porcupine Carragana Hospital is not closed or further downsized.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are all from the community of Porcupine Plain.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise on behalf of people from the Foam Lake area who are concerned about the future of their health centre. The prayer reads:

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Margo, Fosston, Rose Valley, and Wadena.

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 Craik Health Centre. 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 Craik Health Centre 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 Craik and Regina.

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 health care facilities. 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 facilities providing health care services in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy are not closed or further downsized.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Radville, Weyburn, and Tyvan.

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 reduction or closing of long-term care beds and health centres. 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.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good citizens from Lafleche, Assiniboia.

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, Imperial health centres:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by good citizens from Davidson, Kenaston, Strongfield, Elbow.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from constituents who are opposed to possible reductions of health care services in Biggar. 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 Biggar Hospital, long-term care home, and ambulance service is maintained at the very least their current level of services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures are from the citizens of Biggar and district.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to present a single petition. And this one is on health care with regards to ambulance service in the Luseland-Dodsland area. 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 the Dodsland and Luseland ambulance services are not discontinued.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Luseland and Major, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

A petition concerning the Gull Lake Health Centre and special care home;

And addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional

paper nos. 48, 160, 165, and 166.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

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

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, a group of 37 great-looking students in the east gallery from Lawson Heights School. I met with those students earlier this morning downstairs.

They had been in Moose Jaw yesterday and toured the tunnels and later on today will be touring the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Museum. They indicated to me that after they toured the tunnels they thought that Al Capone was cool. When they go home to their parents, I hope that they don't also report that they found the members of this Assembly cool in the same sense, Mr. Speaker.

They are accompanied today by chaperones, Diane Dufour and Mr. Flysak, and their teachers, Daryl McKen and Steven Simpson. And I would like to ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of students and chaperones and teachers to their Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the gallery, Jorge Anaya from Colombia, seated in your gallery; Barbara Wood, translator, from Vancouver; Tom Graham, president of CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) Saskatchewan; and Cheryl Stadnichuk, CUPE staff research officer.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Anaya is a teacher by profession and was leader of his teachers' union in Colombia for 20 years. He is presently the treasurer of the Unitary Workers Centre of Colombia, similar to our Canadian Labour Congress.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Anaya has come to Canada as part of a national tour. He is meeting with trade unionists in our province explaining how Colombian trade unionists are fighting to defend public services such as education, health care, electricity, water services from privatization. Mr. Speaker, Colombian trade unionists are doing all this in an environment of severe repression and violations of the most basic trade union and human rights. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to be able to introduce Mr. Anaya to this Assembly. And I ask all members to join me in welcoming them to our province.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Martensville.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to other members of this legislature, an individual sitting in your gallery, Mr. Rick Schellenberg. And I would ask him to stand as I introduce him.

Mr. Schellenberg is the president of Bethany Bible Institute in Hepburn, and that's soon to be Bethany Bible College, we hope. Bethany serves the Mennonite Brethren community in Saskatchewan and to an extent the larger Christian community in Saskatchewan, Alberta; and is also to some extent a national and international school.

And he's here today, as I said, to watch the passage of Bill No. 301. And I would ask that all members welcome him to his legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly, Mary Cherneskey from the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana.

Mary Cherneskey used to be a colleague of mine when we worked together at the Office of the Rentalsman. Mrs. Cherneskey is a well-known connoisseur of the arts in the city of Saskatoon. As well, she has been involved in several Ukrainian organizations, professional and businesswomen's organizations, the Provincial Council of Women.

She was here to attend the Volunteer Medal presentation yesterday. And I know that she also has been very involved with the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan and Canada, having been a candidate against the former premier, Premier Romanow in Saskatoon Riversdale. She is an ardent follower of politics and I want to welcome her very much to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Saskatoon Women of Distinction Awards

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to attend the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) Women of Distinction Awards in Saskatoon last night, along with six members of this legislature. Some 600 people attended the 23rd annual dinner, which handed out 10 awards to women who are inspiring generations, which was this year's theme.

The Lifetime Achievement Award went to Carole Gorgchuk, founder of the Family Healing Circle Lodge. Artist Lorette Brown was chosen in the arts category. The Cultural Heritage Award was presented to dancer and singer Mireille Hanu-Lee. The award for education and lifelong learning was given to Norma Jensen. This year's Entrepreneur Award winner was Rhoda O'Malley; 85-year-old Mickey MacLellan took home the Health, Well-being, and Spirituality Award. The Science, Technology, and Environment Award was given to Virginia Wittrock. Anne-Marie Graham was the recipient of the Women in Professions Award. This year's Young Woman to Watch is

Nicole White.

I want to make special mention, Mr. Speaker, of the award winners in the community development and social activism category. This year's winner was the Everybody's Playground Committee. This committee consists of five amazing women from the Saskatoon Silver Springs constituency. They are Sherry Pehudoff, Peggy Dauvin, Tracey McHardy, Audrey Cote, and Laurel Scherr.

These women raised \$200,000 to construct the city's first totally accessible playground intended to help foster an understanding of the challenges faced by children with physical limitations.

I would ask all members of this legislature to join me in recognizing all nominees, award winners, and committee members. These are women who significantly enrich our communities, homes, and lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I and five of my government colleagues also had the privilege last night of attending the YWCA Women of Distinction Awards Dinner in Saskatoon.

And as the member for Silver Springs has made reference to, this was a very successful and inspiring event, Mr. Speaker. An event that, of course, celebrates the contribution that women in Saskatoon have made to the community and also a very important fundraiser for the YWCA because the funds that are raised, Mr. Speaker, contribute to the work of the safe shelter for women and children in Saskatoon, assist the unemployed, and of course help fund important recreational opportunities for disadvantaged children.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make particular reference to two women who were recognized last night posthumously. The awards were presented to their families in recognition of their long-time service to the YWCA. And these were awards to Meredith McPherson Stalwick and Dorothy Long, Mr. Speaker. And their families received those awards.

And I want to join with the member for Silver Springs in also recognizing the 27 nominees, Mr. Speaker, and the nine award recipients who were recognized last night for their outstanding service. Our warm congratulations to them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, before proceeding with the rest of our member statements I would ask leave of the Assembly to revert back to introduction of guests for a moment.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

(10:15)

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. I recognize the member for Batoche.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With great pleasure I'd like to introduce the grade 8 class from Cudworth. Their teacher Lindsay Olson and Brian Dyer are there with them. And they're seated up in the east gallery — and also the young lady over on the side here. So it's with great pleasure I would like to introduce them to you, and through you to our Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moosomin.

Proposed Wind Power Project

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning I want to talk about a couple of RMs (rural municipalities) in the constituency of Moosomin that have come forward with a proposal to assist SaskPower in meeting its goal of attaining 45 megawatts of electricity from alternative sources such as wind, solar, biomass, waste heat, and flare gas over the next three years under their environmentally preferred power program.

Mr. Speaker, I speak of the RMs of Moosomin and Martin who have joined together with Gaia Power, Inc. of Kingston, Ontario, and propose to build two to four wind turbines in the Moosomin area at a cost of about \$11 million.

Mr. Speaker, this proposal is coming under the Pipestone prairie wind power project. And they put forward a proposal back in September, are one of 32 organizations that have been selected to provide detailed business plans to SaskPower by May 28. Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. The director of the projects for Gaia Power is Samit Sharma, who was an engineer with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. And he indicates that the project would consist of up to four wind turbines generating anywhere from 1.5 to 1.8 megawatts each, enough electricity to supply 2,700 homes with power.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sharma says he hopes the project gets the go-ahead from his former employer because, "I love Saskatchewan. I would love to do a project in the province of Saskatchewan." Congratulations to the Pipestone prairie wind power project on this endeavour.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Labour Studies Convocation at the University of Saskatchewan

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, last night in Saskatoon I had the privilege to attend the ninth convocation of the labour studies program at the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate

the 13 graduates of the three-year labour studies who graduated this year.

The labour studies program is a unique partnership between the College of Commerce at the University of Saskatchewan and the labour community, providing the only university-based labour education program exclusively for trade unionists. The labour studies program provides participants with the opportunity to understand the history of trade unions, explore the challenges of today, and learn how to develop and shape ideas for the labour community in the future.

Mr. Speaker, since the program received university senate approval in 1987, over 800 students have taken one or more classes, and approximately 80 individuals have completed their labour studies certificate. As a former CUPE representative, I know that labour studies students, graduates, trade unionists, and members of the community speak very highly of this program.

Mr. Speaker, this program is one of a kind and so are its graduates. I ask all members today to join me in congratulating all the graduates of the labour studies certificate program for their hard work, commitment to lifelong learning, and dedication to the labour movement. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ceremonial Review of Wadena Cadet Corps

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was privileged to attend the Annual Ceremonial Review of 2271 Wadena Royal Canadian Artillery Cadet Corps. The cadet program plays an important role in the lives of the young people involved, as well as the community as a whole. Cadets gain knowledge and skills that are unique. This knowledge and the new relationships and friendships that are cultivated affect their future, how they look at the world, and how they make the world a better place to live.

The reviewing officer for last night's event was a Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Eyre, CD (Canadian Forces Decoration). Colonel Eyre was stationed in Bosnia for two tours in the 1990s. Mr. Speaker, all cadets work very hard throughout the year, but at each review those who have excelled in specific areas are recognized.

Last night Cadet Dolph received the Kristjanson Trophy for green star proficiency, Gunner Sabiston received the Legion Trophy for red star proficiency, Master Bombardier Vander Gucht received the legion star for silver star proficiency, Bombardier Bird received the Sobchyshyn Trophy for most improved cadet, Cadet Hoffman received the Russell Trophy for most sportsmanlike cadet, Cadet Hrynchyshyn received the Spray Trophy for the best cadet on parade, and Warrant Officer Nelson received the Legion Trophy for highest proficiency.

A special part of the ceremonies was Elaine Melsted receiving her commissioning scroll signed by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson appointing her with a commission in Her Majesty's

Canadian Forces.

The immense amount of work and practice by these cadets and their officers, J. Bell, Lieutenant Proznick, Second Lieutenants Enright and Melsted, was very apparent in a polished presentation.

I ask the Assembly to join with me in congratulating the cadet corps.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

École St. Paul 50th Anniversary

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, today École St. Paul, located in my constituency of Saskatoon Meewasin, is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, École St. Paul has beginnings in the basement of St. Paul's Cathedral in 1911, but found a permanent home in the 1950s when there was a need for a new school serving in the downtown and North Park area in Saskatoon. This school was originally named St. Paul's North and had five classrooms under the direction of principal R.B. Pravda.

Mr. Speaker, École St. Paul has since become an integral part of its community. In 1970 it became the first school to offer both an English and French immersion program in Saskatoon, and in 1985 it became entirely French immersion.

Mr. Speaker, the role that several religious orders have played in the development of École St. Paul have been significant. Both the Sisters of Sion and les Filles de la Providence were among some of the women to teach at the school.

Mr. Speaker, there's always been a strong sense of community that exists at École St. Paul. A former student who graduated from grade 8 in 1989 said, and I quote:

I find myself driving past St. Paul's every once in a while and remembering all the good and bad times I had there and how it started to shape me for the remainder of my life. When I have children of my own, my only hope is that they'll have the caring and dedicated teachers that I have had through my years of schooling.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues will join me in acknowledging the teachers, the principals, and administrators who have served the school community, and in congratulating everyone at École St. Paul on their 50th anniversary.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Kindersley Klippers Advance to Semifinal

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Kindersley Junior Klippers desperately needed a win to stay in the Royal Bank Cup semifinals last night, and they came through.

And the pressure was on the Junior Klippers, since they had not yet won a game in the tournament, and the Nanaimo Klippers were giving it everything they had to stay in the playoffs. With the upcoming final . . . And I know that the Speaker enjoys the play by play, so I hope that he can follow here just to give you a highlight of the game.

The Klippers were up 4 to 0 in the second period but the Klippers came back to score one goal in the second and another one in the third. But the Klippers managed to hang on to their two-point lead and I'm pleased to report that the Klippers now advance to the Royal Bank Cup semifinals.

Mr. Speaker, the Kindersley Klippers will face off against the hometown favourite, the Grande Prairie Storm, in the Crystal Centre tomorrow night and the gold medal round being played on Sunday.

I ask all members of the House to wish the Kindersley Junior Klippers all the best. Our Anavet Cup and MemberCare Cup champions from Saskatchewan have fought hard to stay in the playoffs and we wish them every success on the weekend in the semi-final game and we hope to see them on the final game on Sunday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

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

Property Tax Relief

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning's *StarPhoenix* in Saskatoon says it all — "NDP breaks word." SARM president, Neal Hardy, said yesterday in the wake of the Minister of Learning's announcement, ". . . there's a line of trust and they've breached that line of trust . . ."

Mr. Speaker, every day the Premier seems to give Saskatchewan people more reason to believe that this government's intent is to break all of its promises that it made in the last campaign. So once again we want to give the Premier the opportunity to stand up in this legislature and tell Saskatchewan people why they should believe anything he has to say.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell you and I can tell members of this House this government intends to keep its word, that there will be property tax relief in this term just as there has been increased funding over the last several years of this government.

What members do not . . . what members of the opposition fail to give this government credit for is the fact that in the last five years we have increased education funding 25 per cent — \$100 million more for the school system; \$100 million more that taxpayers put in that could have been used for tax relief but instead was used to improve services for school-age children.

That was a choice that this government made to provide the money. That was a choice divisions made to make sure that money was available for education.

We will continue to provide new money into our education system and we will continue to make sure that the system is affordable, that it is sustainable, and that there is property tax relief in this term of government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Well the minister, Mr. Speaker, conveniently forgets that that NDP (New Democratic Party) government gutted the education budget in this province in its first half a decade in office since being elected in 1991 — \$300 million plus, Mr. Speaker, they took out of education.

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Premier may want to answer some questions this morning because SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and taxpayers across this province are feeling betrayed in the wake of the announcement that was made yesterday.

The Premier was clear during the election campaign. There would be room to accept the Boughen recommendations within his fiscal framework. That's what he said. He went to SARM, and he told the delegates of SARM that the status quo wasn't on.

Mr. Speaker, these are things that the Premier of this province said. Yesterday's announcement fundamentally breaks his word, breaks the promises that he's made to Saskatchewan people. And we ask him again, we ask him again to stand up in this legislature and tell the people of the province why they should believe a word he has to say.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I appreciate the preamble that the member opposite gave to his question, because I know it troubles members on this side of the House that today we continue to pay more on the interest on the debt built up by that party opposite in whatever incarnation it had than we spend on education. It saddens us that we continue to be in that position, Mr. Speaker.

But I can tell the members opposite this. We are committed to making sure there is tax relief. We are committed to making sure we have an education system that is sustainable. We are committed to making sure that children have the best possible education in this province, because that is what this debate is about. It is not about property tax, it is about making sure we have affordable education. And that is what the member opposite should say.

I thought it was interesting yesterday that the member for Indian Head-Milestone stood in this House and said we should implement the Boughen report — not cherry-pick it, implement it.

That, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, means your members would need to vote . . . that, Mr. Speaker, means the Leader of the Opposition and his party would need to vote for a tax increase that would expand the tax onto restaurant meals, which is something they have said they would never do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that that minister would refer to the fiscal policy of the 1980s when it is his Premier that is repeating those mistakes. His Premier, Mr. Speaker, that inherited surplus from Mr. Romanow and promptly turned it into a deficit and has added over a billion dollars to the debt of this province, Mr. Speaker, repeating the mistakes of that decade.

Mr. Speaker, in today's newspaper, the political columnist for *The StarPhoenix* and the *Leader-Post*, Mr. Mandryk, he had some interesting comments. Here's what he says, and I quote:

We can't . . . trust what the NDP said in its election platform. We can't . . . trust what it (said) in (its) government announcements. We can't . . . trust what . . . (it tells) reporters in scrums.

We can't . . . trust what the premier and . . . (their ministers) tell stakeholders at their annual convention and those stakeholders can't . . . trust what ministers tell them in private meetings.

Will the Premier stand up in the wake of yesterday's announcement and tell the people of this province and stakeholders in education why they should trust a word he has to say?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, this government has put \$100 million more into the education system to deal with improved quality of that system and to help mitigate the pressure on property tax. This government has introduced the most significant reforms to education restructuring in 60 years.

This government will move forward with property tax reform but it will also make sure that we have a system that is sustainable, that does not have school divisions that have no schools, does not have school divisions that have no students, that we will have a sustainable system, that we will have a clearer, simpler, more transparent funding system, that there will be no school closures during this time. And we will do it in a way that respects local autonomy.

Mr. Speaker, the time for debate, the time for consultation, the time for reports is done. This government is moving forward

with a plan of action.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Learning said that 30 per cent of any new equalization money will go to property tax relief. That's quite a promise, Mr. Speaker, especially when you consider what the Minister of Finance said the other day. I asked him how much he expects to receive in equalization this year. He said, and I quote, "If it keeps going at this rate, I suspect we'll receive very little in the way of equalization payments this year."

That's no new money, Mr. Speaker. In other words the NDP is promising 30 per cent of nothing. Mr. Speaker, property tax relief in this province is going to be 30 per cent of nothing.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier promised to reduce property taxes. Why is he breaking his word?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader, Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question and for again raising attention to this issue that we have in Saskatchewan with respect to equalization and the unfair and inequitable treatment that we as a people receive, we believe, from the federal government when it comes to equalization.

We would hope, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government can see its way clear to arriving at a new and improved agreement with the province of Saskatchewan, with the people of Saskatchewan, so that we can retain more of the monies that we make in our royalties so that those retained royalties can then be used for more appropriate purposes such as education, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — You know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps coming up with new and creative ways to break his word. He's actually developed a mathematical formula for doing nothing. He's going to give 30 per cent of new equalization money to property tax relief but at the same time he knows full well there is no new equalization money. So the Premier is promising 30 per cent of nothing.

Thirty per cent of nothing equals the NDP's commitment to property tax relief . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please, members. Order. Order, please. Member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, 30 per cent of nothing equals

what this Premier's word is worth.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier make this phony promise to get elected when he had no intention of ever keeping . . .

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

The member from Canora-Pelly . . . Order, please. The member from Canora-Pelly is reflecting upon the intentions of another member, and I would ask him to withdraw that last remark before we proceed.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I'll withdraw the remark and I'll phrase it this way. I am entitled to the question. The question that I ask of the Premier is the promises that he made in the election campaign were totally disregarded yesterday. Why is the minister following that type of a promise?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The question the member asks is not premised on a statement of fact. The fact is is that the money that Saskatchewan is entitled to through equalization is today sitting in the bank account in Ottawa. All we're saying to Ottawa is stop ripping off Saskatchewan and let us keep the royalties on the same basis that other provinces are allowed to keep it. As new money comes into the system, we will, on a sustainable basis, be able to provide real and lasting property tax relief.

There are other ways to do that. There is \$56 million today that could be achieved by putting the sales tax onto restaurant meals. That would provide today a 10 per cent cut in property tax if it were dedicated that way. But no member on that side, other than the member for Indian Head-Milestone, is suggesting that. People are not advocating this. This is about choice.

We're saying as new money comes in on a sustainable basis, new money will be available targeted to property tax relief. That is a fair statement. That is a fair approach.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at the document that the Minister of Finance presented in this House.

Mr. Minister, at the end of last year, the province of Saskatchewan received, as forecasted in his document, \$40 million. That's it. Equalization payment was \$40 million. Today we see a barrel of oil priced at the WTI (West Texas Intermediate) price is at \$40 a barrel. This Finance minister worked out his budget document on \$26.50 a barrel. Those numbers don't match, Mr. Speaker.

There may be a situation where there will be no equalization payment for the province of Saskatchewan. The Finance Minister is wanting that to happen. In his comments in Ottawa, he said we would like to be a have province. A have province

means that we don't get equalization money. How can you promise property tax relief at 30 per cent of nothing? Why is the minister making that promise that he cannot keep?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I think the issue here is Saskatchewan being able to retain more of the royalties that it makes without having them excessively clawed back through equalization. I think that's the issue here, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Amalgamating School Divisions

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned a couple of things from the Minister of Learning. First of all we learned the fact that they're going to force amalgamation. They said that they're going to go to 40 school divisions in the province.

The other thing that we learned from the minister is he said that there was going to be at least 5,000 students per school division. That's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, when there's only 171,000 students in our province. How do you get 40 school divisions out of 171,000 students?

I think the first education reform we need to have in this province is a math tutor for the Minister of Learning. You can't get 40 school divisions out of 171,000 students at 5,000 students per division. Mr. Speaker, how many divisions does the minister really expect to see in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well I always appreciate math advice from the members opposite. But I'll tell you this, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this, I said clearly yesterday in my speech to the media and certainly in this House that we have no constitutional ability to force amalgamation in Catholic divisions. Catholic divisions, separate school divisions have low enrolment. So that will in fact necessitate that those divisions will have smaller populations.

I cannot facilitate an amalgamation of the francophone systems which is constitutionally guaranteed and only has 1,000 students. Some of these divisions will be smaller than 5,000 students. Some may be smaller than 1,000 students. But what we need to do is to try and set a reasonable threshold to move forward.

And I want to be clear that when I said that there would be no more than 40 school divisions, that is the number that we believe is reasonable when we take a look at Manitoba with a similar population, and only 34.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, if you look at the numbers a little bit further, we'll find that 66,000 students are in the four school divisions in Regina and Saskatoon. That leaves about a 105,000 students for the rest of the province. When you subtract out the separate school divisions, the northern school divisions, and Lloydminster, that leaves about 75,000 students to divide up in the rest of the province. If you take 5,000 students per division that adds up to 15 school divisions for the rest of the province — 15 school divisions.

That's kind of an interesting number, Mr. Speaker, because if you go back and you look at the Scharf-Langlois report and a map already drawn up, it has 15 school divisions for the rest of the province, Mr. Speaker. That seems a little more than just a coincidence.

Is it not the real plan of this minister to force 15 school divisions on the rest of the province in this . . . on the rest of the school divisions in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well I'm glad to hear that the member for Indian Head-Milestone dug out that report. I'm sure that Scharf-Langlois is another one of those reports that he referenced yesterday that we should just read and then follow the recommendations of — well except unless it interferes with their political argument.

I have said clearly that the thresholds we want to work on, either there'll be no more than 40 divisions, that we will respect the Catholic right to minority faith systems, we'll respect our constitutional responsibility in terms of the francophone system, and that we believe that there needs to be a system in place where there are no fewer than 5,000 students per district and that we have each district qualifying on a relatively uniform basis in terms of their assessment.

If the member opposite has alternate criteria, he should be feeling free to bring those forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I think following along with the theme that you can't believe a word they say, because frankly I don't believe that they're going to end up with 40 school divisions. And neither do they, Mr. Speaker, neither do they.

In a PowerPoint presentation done by the Department of Learning in a technical briefing yesterday, they have the PowerPoint slide that talks about the number of school divisions across Canada. It also says that in Saskatchewan in 2004 there

are 82 school divisions, which is exactly true.

But further on, Mr. Speaker, on the same slide, it shows Saskatchewan in 2006 with 28 school divisions — exactly what 15 rural and the rest will make up. Is it not true that they're planning the math for 28 school divisions, not 40 as the minister just said. Which one is it? Tell the truth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I think it's in the grade five math curriculum where we talk about greater than and less than signs, in trying to explain this. But I'm pretty sure that 25 is less than 40 and 28 is less than 40 and 35 is less than 40. I don't know what the number is. I have said clearly no more than 40. I don't know how many times to say this — there will be no more than 40 divisions.

I don't know today how many divisions that is. I can't say whether that is 25 divisions or whether that is 35 divisions. What it will depend on is to what extent we can get amalgamation within the Catholic system on a voluntary basis, and to what extent the division . . . the task force that I've announced yesterday is able to get agreement on a number within the public system.

But it will be less than 40. And that is what I said yesterday. That is what I'm saying today — no more than 40 divisions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I don't need a lesson from the member opposite to tell me what greater than and less than means. I know this government is less than honest on every promise . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, the School Boards Association has completely rejected the NDP's forced amalgamations. President Lance Bean, and I quote, said this:

This has little to do with addressing (equality) equity. This has nothing to do with addressing the property tax relief. This is nothing more than a diversion from the real issue.

And that is exactly true, Mr. Speaker.

This government cannot follow up on the promises it made regarding the education portion of property tax, so what it has done is tried to frame the argument around amalgamations. Why don't they live up to the promises they made in the last general election and do some real property tax relief in this province? That's the issue that every taxpayer in this province wants to see, is real property tax relief.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is less than forthcoming in terms of what their real agenda is here, and it has nothing to do with fixing the school system or making sure there's rural property tax relief.

What we have said is very clear in terms of what we believe the solution is. It first of all is based upon restructuring the divisions so that as new money goes in, it goes appropriately across the province.

Second of all, the foundation operating grant must be reviewed.

Third of all, we need to deal with property taxes. That is the commitment that this government has made in the campaign. That is the commitment this government makes in this House. That is the commitment we will follow through on in this term of government.

I read with interest, Mr. Speaker, the item in the members' newsletter today that was circulated and sits on members' desks, and I direct the member for Indian Head-Milestone to page 4 of that where there's a quote by John Kenneth Galbraith that says:

Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable.

The plan I put forward may well be unpalatable, but for us to do nothing would be disastrous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Investment Losses

Mr. Wall: — You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what's sadder — the government's priorities in terms of its funding, Mr. Speaker, or the fact that it's pinning its hopes on delivering on a promise for reduced education taxes on property on the fact that we would remain a have-not province. That's what they're saying today. They're pinning their hopes on keeping a promise on Saskatchewan staying a have-not province.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we see daily the priorities of this government played out in headlines and in the medias of this province and here in the Legislative Assembly, and the latest of course is the news about this Premier's investment in Atlanta, Georgia, where they invested \$24 million taxpayers' dollars, Mr. Speaker.

They've got no money for rural property tax relief. They've got no money for urban property tax relief or to keep acute care beds open or long-term care beds open. But they've got \$24 million to invest in a dot-com in Georgia.

I wonder if the Premier would take to his feet today and explain to the people of this province why he has no money for property tax relief, but he can lose 24 million on a dot-com in Atlanta, Georgia.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, this has nothing to do with Atlanta, Georgia or whatever else smokescreen the opposition wants to put forward. This is about what is sustainable and what is real in terms of property tax relief. We know full well, all members know in this House, that this is about making choices. This is about choices in the budget where we have decided that our first priority is health care, and we have provided another 160 million there.

This is about putting money in to deal with property tax mitigation, as we saw with \$28 million more — 10 million for revenue-sharing, 18 million into the school boards. This is about deciding not to expand the PST (provincial sales tax) onto restaurant meals that yes, would have provided directly \$56 million or a 10 per cent cut in property taxes. This is about choices. This government has made its choices. The members opposite want to revisit it, but they never want to commit to one.

I want to know, does the member stand by his statement yesterday, the member for Indian Head-Milestone, that we should expand the PST and implement the report as he says in *Hansard* yesterday. That's what I want to know. It's time that that opposition come forward as planned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is absolutely right, he's absolutely right. It is about choices, Mr. Speaker, and they chose to waste \$28 million on SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) instead of investing in health care. Mr. Speaker, they choose to invest in dot-coms in Nashville and lose millions of dollars there, instead of investing in rural Saskatchewan, in health care in rural Saskatchewan.

They chose to invest in 2000, 17 million in Retx.com; in 2002 they chose to invest another \$4 million — good money after bad — in 2003 another \$2 million, Mr. Speaker. And now we learned they've written off the whole investment. They've sold this \$24 million worth of taxpayers' investment they made for 150 grand, Mr. Speaker. That's what we find out yesterday.

I want the Premier to stand up and explain to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, property taxpayers, why he pleads poverty to them. He has no money for them, but he can blow 24 million of their money on a dot-com in Georgia.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — We have made choices on this side, for the most part in terms of where our priorities are — in health care and education, where we've put new money. It is unfortunate we do not have a choice in terms of paying the

\$600 million to help pay for that interest on the debt that the members opposite built up and squandered. Forget about the argument that the member opposite puts forward that somehow this is a new approach. This is about the affordability of our education system. This is about spending money that we have. This is about making choices as to when new money comes in, where our priority is.

And we have said clearly, this government's priorities are health, education, and tax reform. That's why we undertook the tax reform on income tax. That's why we undertook the tax reform on the PST. That is why we are undertaking the tax reform in property relief.

This is about sustainable tax reform. This is about choices to support our health care and education system. It is not about the political grandstanding and the Pollyanna attitude of the member opposite that we can do anything we want if we just put our mind to it. Because we have constraints that we need to live in on this side, and we have . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed . . . (inaudible) . . . the Leader of the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Once again, Mr. Speaker, once again we put this question to the Premier of the province who went around Saskatchewan for 28 days and made some very specific promises.

We ask him to take this opportunity today to stand up and explain to people why he's breaking his promises with respect to property taxes; why he's pinning his hopes on delivering on that promise on this great Saskatchewan staying a have-not province. He could stand on his feet to clarify that.

And while he's on his feet, will he explain to taxpayers and to those who want health care across this province, while he's prepared to lose 24 million of their dollars in Georgia, but he's got nothing on keeping his word, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we are going to make our case in the nation's capital for fair equalization for the province of Saskatchewan. But as I have said, as the Minister of Finance has said, as this government has clearly said, it is our goal to see the end of equalization.

And, Mr. Speaker, when that occurs, and it will occur as we develop and build our industry in Saskatchewan, you are going to see the ability for Saskatchewan people to enjoy the benefit of their resources. We need the support of the Leader of the Opposition, not the criticism of the Leader of the Opposition on this case.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this week, this week we have clearly seen the nature of this opposition. The leader came to his office saying that he wants to build ahead a new, more constructive opposition. Have we seen a new, more constructive

opposition?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We've seen anything but a constructive opposition. We've seen an opposition in this House, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order. Order please, members. Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we have . . . The people of Saskatchewan have just witnessed the new constructive opposition. That's what they've witnessed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — They have witnessed an opposition that has not a new idea — an opposition that walks into this House telling us that we should spend more and spend more and spend more; an opposition that one day says we should put the tax on the restaurant meals, the next day it says that we shouldn't; an opposition that says we should balance the budget, that we should cut the taxes.

Mr. Speaker, there is no credibility. There is no credibility in this opposition, and they've got a long ways to go before they will ever sit on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, please.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 55 — The Regional Health Services Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 55, The Regional Health Services Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read the first time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Health that Bill No. 55, The Regional Health Services Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read for the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Deputy Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Next sitting.

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

The Speaker: — Orders of the day. I recognize the

Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, before we proceed to orders of the day, I wonder if I might have leave of the Assembly to revert to . . . or to proceed directly to consideration of private Bills in Committee of the Whole and then revert to the schedule for orders of the day.

The Speaker: — The House Leader has requested leave to proceed first with private Bills and then revert back to motion for the 75-minute debate. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. Committee of the Whole. I do now leave the Chair for a few moments.

PRIVATE BILLS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 301 — The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2004

The Chair: — Order. The first item before the Committee of the Whole is Bill No. 301, The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2004.

Clauses 1 to 9 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The Chair: — Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: Bill No. 301, An Act to amend The Bethany Bible Institute Incorporation Act, 1993.

I would invite the member to move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

Mr. Heppner: — I move that we report the Bill, Bill No. 301, without amendment.

The Chair: — The member for Martensville has moved that Bill No. 301 be reported without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 302 — The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc. Act

The Chair: — The next item before the committee is Bill. No. 302, The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc. Act.

Clauses 1 to 3 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The Chair: — Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan,

enacts as follows: Bill No. 302, an Act to provide for certain degree-granting status for The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc.

And I would invite the member to move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the committee report Bill No. 302 without amendment.

The Chair: — The member for Moosomin has moved that the committee report the Bill without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association Amendment Act, 2004

The Chair: — The third item before the committee is Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association Amendment Act, 2004.

Clauses 1 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The Chair: — Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: Bill No. 303, An Act to amend an Act to incorporate The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association.

And I would invite the member to move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

Mr. McCall: — I move that the committee report the Bill.

The Chair: — The member for Regina Elphinstone has moved that the committee report the Bill without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

The Chair: — I would invite the Government Deputy House Leader that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I would move the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chair: — The Deputy Government House Leader has moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again? Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of committees.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 301 — The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2004

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the committee to report item No. 1, Bill No. 301 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be read a third time?

Mr. Heppner: — I move that Bill No. 301, The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Martensville that Bill No. 301, The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Third reading of this Bill.

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

(11:00)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of committees.

Bill No. 302 — The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc. Act

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the committee to report item no. 2, Bill No. 302 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be read a third time? I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 302, The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc. Act be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Moosomin that Bill No. 302, The Fountain of Life School of Ministry Inc. be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Third reading of this Bill.

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

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of committees.

Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association Amendment Act, 2004

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am instructed by the committee to report item no. 3, Bill No. 303 without amendment, and to ask for leave to sit again.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a third time? I recognize the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Mr. McCall: — I move that Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Elphinstone-Centre that Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Third reading of this Bill.

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

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government's Housing Strategy

Mr. McCall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and honour to rise today in the legislature to speak about HomeFirst, the Government of Saskatchewan's new and innovative housing strategy.

At the conclusion of my remarks I will be moving that this Assembly support HomeFirst, the government's new provincial housing initiative, and recognizes the ongoing services that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides to the people of Saskatchewan, and it's . . . I will be seconded by the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, and I thank him for that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the new HomeFirst strategy was briefly hinted at during both the Speech from the Throne and the

2004-2005 provincial budget. The Premier of Saskatchewan formally introduced the new strategy in its name, HomeFirst, on May 5, 2004, in front of no fewer than 50 housing stakeholders, municipal and provincial and federal partners and representatives of the local community groups and private industry. And I might say, Mr. Speaker, that it took place in my constituency of Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

I would also like to, at this point, commend the hard work that has been done on this file by the former minister for Community Resources and Employment, the member from Moose Jaw North and the hard work that's been done by the present Minister for Community Resources and Employment, the member for Regina Rosemont. They've done a great job on this file, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the continued rollout of this project.

HomeFirst was introduced outdoors in the parking lot at Washington Park Place, a successful inner-city housing project administered by Ehrlo Society. It's a partnership that was between Saskatchewan Housing, Ehrlo community society and the Department of Community Resources and Employment. There's 11 young moms that have the chance to have safe and secure housing there and to make sure that their young children get off to a good start. It's a great program. And that is the kind of, that's the kind of possibility that is raised by the HomeFirst initiative.

It's no coincidence that HomeFirst was introduced outdoors. What better way to demonstrate the importance of safe, reliable and quality housing to the people of Saskatchewan. What coincidence . . . What a coincidence it was, Mr. Speaker, that on the day of the launch it was raining, there was sleet, there was snow, there were wind and you know, winds gusting up to 50-km an hour. What a great reminder of the importance of shelter in this, particularly in this harsh Saskatchewan, sometimes harsh Saskatchewan climate.

There were plenty of media at the HomeFirst launch and let me tell you, the importance of good housing, especially during the terrible weather conditions, were not lost on them or on their subsequent reportage of the event.

Now what is HomeFirst? I know that no fewer than 100 individuals have contacted Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment since May 5 to find out more information, to find out how to sign up and basically to try to help themselves and their families build a little more independence through quality housing.

HomeFirst, Mr. Speaker, is a new way of looking at housing that goes beyond bricks and mortar and builds on to the ongoing successes of our broader social policy.

I believe that it is fair to say that we all share the goal of having our own home. A good home can contribute to raising a healthy family. A good quality home can help us find and keep a fulfilling, steady job. A good stable home can allow our youth to stay in school longer, to complete their studies and to also proudly contribute to the Saskatchewan way of life. Mr. Speaker, a good home is what young families need to prosper and grow.

A good accessible home can help our seniors stay independent longer in the communities where they choose to live.

A home that meets the needs of people with disabilities can help them also build their independence and live productive, fulfilling lives without the roadblocks or hassles that they may normally encounter in other kinds of housing. For the province's First Nation and Métis communities, as with all our citizens, good homes help build good, healthy communities. Nowhere is this more important than in our inner cities and in the North.

Mr. Speaker, HomeFirst is about creating good quality, affordable homes. It is about continuing programs that have been successful in the past. It is about developing and launching new programs that will result in better homes for low- to moderate-income people across the province.

We are living during a time of historically low mortgage rates, yet for many people home ownership or even the prospect of renting a good place to live is still a very distant dream. And why is that, Mr. Speaker? I think it's because access to housing is tied to both the availability of good quality homes and the availability to afford those homes. We can build homes but we must also create the conditions so that families can afford them both today and tomorrow. We must help young families take pride in where they live and, equally important, want to grow and thrive here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan has introduced HomeFirst because we are facing a challenge and we are seized with an opportunity. To pay for their housing costs many families are paying too much of their money they earn on housing. A great many individuals and families are also living in overcrowded or substandard housing conditions. Our new approach to housing is a balanced approach that will benefit both the people in need and the communities in which they work, live, and go to school.

Mr. Speaker, HomeFirst will play a key role in building stability, increasing affordability, and enhancing the quality of available housing. HomeFirst is not a single sign on the dotted line, Mr. Speaker, it's a vision for the province based on an innovative framework for a number of new programs and enhancements of the existing programs.

It's a five-year housing strategy that will help us maximize our resources to specifically meet our society's fundamental need to have a place to call home. It is a five-year housing strategy that will help us . . . Over the next five years, HomeFirst and the programs under its roof will result in long-term sustainability of valuable public . . . of our valuable public housing asset.

HomeFirst will help create fair and equitable access for families and individuals through affordable quality housing. It will take greater advantage of existing good quality housing stock in the province through working with industry and the private sector. It will help people to save money and to build up their assets and achieve self-sufficiency. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, HomeFirst will help us tackle poverty. HomeFirst will help us rejuvenate and stabilize our inner-city neighbourhoods and our northern communities.

Mr. Speaker, in this House you have heard the government use words such as partnership, pride, and vision. Saskatchewan is a province with a wide open future. And as we prepare to welcome and celebrate our centennial year, our vision for the future of our province and its people has never been as important as it is today. And HomeFirst is fundamental to that vision.

HomeFirst does build on existing programs, some of which have already been launched. But over the next five years it will go much further than we ever have gone before as a province to develop and secure quality, stable housing and to help our people build independence.

In the next fiscal year alone, Mr. Speaker, we will invest \$25 million in the development of affordable housing and renovation programs for low-to moderate-income families — households.

I am pleased to provide the members with some very specific numbers. Approximately 10,000 additional low-income Saskatchewan family households will be assisted each year through brand new supplements currently under development and set to be launched in 2005. Up to 1,600 additional persons with disabilities will also be helped through a new supplement set to be launched in 2005. Both of these supplements are brand new, Mr. Speaker.

Already under the centenary affordable housing program 358 homes have been built. Over the next five years we will see 2,000 more homes built. This is just one small part of the HomeFirst plan. Through HomeFirst, 500 family households will have the opportunity to become homeowners through homeownership programming with government assisted housing. This will help many young families realize the dream of owning their own homes, something that many of us take for granted.

Starting this year — and not some time in the distant future but this year and over the next five years — another 3,000 homes and rental units will be repaired through HomeFirst renovation programs.

Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with our communities, the private sector, and our municipal and federal partners to achieve this vision. Over the next five years our investment through HomeFirst will total \$200 million. This investment will directly benefit over 17,000 households annually. And that is good news for our economy, Mr. Speaker.

Here in Regina and in our cities and in some of our rural communities, we have seen tremendous growth in the development of our retail and service sectors and just this week we heard that job numbers are up for the third month in a row. And that's our private sectors at work, Mr. Speaker. Through HomeFirst, we are making it possible for all people to contribute to this growth and to benefit from it.

Our investment in housing will benefit our inner cities and northern communities and will result in 3,100 additional person years of employment over the next five years. That's incredible, Mr. Speaker. The spinoff to our economy, especially the construction and renovation sectors, will result in

approximately \$300 million worth of activity.

In time, low-to moderate-income citizens, their families, and their neighbours will built up their independence and rely less on public funds and social assistance. This, in turn, allows those in our communities who are most vulnerable and most in need of assistance to quickly and easily benefit from available shelter and support programs.

This will help us all work together, public and private sector, individuals and whole communities, to build safe affordable homes and neighbourhoods that will keep our youth closer to home, help seniors stay in their houses longer, and to attract new investment and people to our province.

Now how can we do this, Mr. Speaker? We can do this because of our ongoing investment in housing through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. In addition to funding from the province, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation receives revenues from tenant rents, the federal government, and municipalities. It has enough revenue from all these sources to fully finance this year's and future years' expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, SHC (Saskatchewan Housing Corporation) is an exceptional manager of a valuable asset. Since 1997 when the federal/provincial social housing agreement was signed, SHC has reduced its operating costs. It has paid off mortgages and other debts totalling \$135 million and this in turn has reduced its interest expense by about \$24 million. That enables us to introduce ambitious strategies like HomeFirst.

Mr. Speaker, over the next five years, \$161 million for housing supply programs, and approximately \$39 million for housing supplements for families and persons with disabilities will be invested.

I know I'm repeating these numbers, but they're significant and they're going to make a very big difference in the lives of these people. \$39 million will go directly to families and persons with disabilities starting in 2005. This means approximately 10,000 additional low-income Saskatchewan family households and 1,600 additional persons with a disabilities will be assisted with housing supplements beginning in 2005.

Mr. Speaker, this represents a new investment. This new investment will increase by 38 per cent our ability to provide housing assistance to a broader segment of Saskatchewan households.

Mr. Speaker, of the \$161 million for housing supply — which will contribute to the improvement of the lives of our people and the communities in which we live and work — these funds include \$46 million for renovation and repair programs, \$104 million for new affordable housing supply, \$10 million to assist low-income households in becoming homeowners, and \$1 million to assess . . . to asset accumulation programs.

Mr. Speaker, a fair chunk of this money is also new. For instance, beginning in 2004, a total of 2,000 more affordable housing units will be delivered by 2008 through the centenary affordable housing program. Of the \$104 million total investment, \$50 million represents an additional provincial funding commitment.

Mr. Speaker, from 1997 to 2003 through a variety of programs, funding and partnership, the Government of Saskatchewan has assisted the housing and renovation needs of more than 5,000 modest- and low-income families in the South and more than 1,000 in the North.

Additionally more than 6,700 seniors throughout our province have benefited through the Saskatchewan assisted living services program.

(11:15)

So to get into a bit of a wrap-up, Mr. Speaker, what is HomeFirst. It's a continuation of these programs, but it is a visionary infrastructure to bring together existing and new programs together under one roof. HomeFirst is a better coordination of our resources and makes it easier for stakeholders, and the public and private sectors to contribute to and realize the success, and evaluate the results of this considerable investment.

Ultimately HomeFirst will build independence for people in our province by making quality housing more affordable, making homeowners . . . creating homeownership opportunities by supporting inner-city neighbourhoods and Northern communities, and by strengthening housing supports by promoting a green environment through energy-efficient housing, and by ensuring sustainability of government-assisted housing.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read into the record some remarks from an article that appeared in *The StarPhoenix* in May 29, 2003. And it's entitled: "Transiency overshadows poverty as an educational hurdle U of S study". And I quote:

Transiency is a critical factor in how (I'd like to thank my colleagues for their assistance. Transiency is a critical factor in how) children perform in school, even more important than family income according to new findings of a research unit at the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, good housing provides stability for neighbourhoods; stabilizing neighbourhoods benefits us all. If we're going to take advantage of programs like Kids First, community schools; if we're going to be able to shut down problem houses through the new legislation introduced, a whole array of things . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Would the member move the motion?

Mr. McCall: — It's right over here. And so Mr. Speaker . . . It is not lost, I would say. I would so move, Mr. Speaker, that this Assembly support HomeFirst, the government's new provincial housing initiative, and recognizes the ongoing services that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides to the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre, and seconded by the member for Saskatoon Sutherland:

That this Assembly support HomeFirst, the government's new provincial housing initiative and recognizes the ongoing services that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides to the people of Saskatchewan.

I recognize the member for Saskatoon Sutherland.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and enter the debate on HomeFirst, our new housing strategy. This new approach to housing is both visionary and practical. HomeFirst really represents a whole new way of thinking about housing in Saskatchewan.

Housing is fundamental, a basic necessity of life. Our vision is that all Saskatchewan people have homes that promote health, independence, security, and dignity. Stable homes are important for children and families, and contribute to their sense of belonging to a community. Housing is important to the provincial economy, with the housing sector providing significant employment and stimulating a lot of economic activity. We don't consider housing to be a stand-alone issue; rather it's closely linked to the other supports individuals and families may need to be successful.

Our government brought the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation together with social services programs in 2002. Through the new department, Community Resources and Employment, housing programs and services are now being integrated with these other supports.

The Building Independence initiative we've had underway for a number of years is one in particular that I want to mention. We've been highly successful to date in reducing poverty and welfare dependencies for families in Saskatchewan. In fact, we've managed to reduce the number of families receiving social assistance by 41 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Simply put, Building Independence is based on the belief that while social assistance can prevent destitution, it's no way out of poverty. A good job is the best way, the only way to beat poverty.

The successful Building Independence program provides a strong foundation for fundamental change in other public policy areas. We are taking this strategic approach and applying what we've learned to the area of housing. By aligning housing policy with Building Independence, we believe that we can help even more people become independent and self-sufficient and resolve many of their housing issues.

HomeFirst is about creating opportunities and providing people with the supports they need to move along their path towards independence. Our new housing supplement will be available to low-income families in 2005 — not just for those families who are on social assistance, but for those working people who need a little extra support with the cost of housing. HomeFirst includes a variety of new and existing housing and income supports delivered in ways that promote individual choice, personal accountability, and economic and social independence. The HomeFirst strategy offers new opportunities for government, families, communities, and private parties in the housing market to work together to ensure low-income people have access to adequate and affordable housing.

What do we want to do, Mr. Speaker? We want to make good quality housing more affordable for low-income and moderate-income people. Let me repeat that. We want to make good quality housing more affordable for low- and moderate-income people. We'll use new income supports, a housing supplement for families and for people with disabilities to do this, and we'll do it in ways that do not encourage dependency.

HomeFirst isn't just about homes; it's about neighbourhoods too. HomeFirst will rejuvenate inner city neighbourhoods and strengthen northern communities through investment in new home construction and repair of existing homes. Our plan supports the dream of home ownership. We believe that people with lower incomes have the same interest in good quality housing and healthy neighbourhoods. And they like other people aspire to as much control and self-sufficiency as possible in their own lives.

We want to find ways for seniors and people with disabilities to live independently. We want to make sure we use energy-efficient options to promote a green and prosperous environment.

We will support the private housing market to be as efficient as possible. Almost all Saskatchewan housing is in the private market, and clearly we'll be working with our partners to get the affordable, suitable housing we need from that private market. And we want to work in partnership. I think it's clear that HomeFirst is not a government-only strategy. It's a partnership approach — individuals, municipalities, community-based partners like First Nations and Métis organizations, industry, the private sector, and all levels of government — all working collaboratively. HomeFirst isn't about what government can do, but rather what we can all do together.

Mr. Speaker, I was very fortunate to be able to serve in my community on the Saskatoon Credit Union board. And one of the options that was presented to that board a number of years ago was working with an organization called Quint Development Corporation. And what Quint was able to do was to form a co-operation within the five inner city organizations or neighbourhoods in Saskatoon. And they were able to set up communities of families that . . . in the first number of years, the corporation owned the home, then after that the family themselves owned the home with support of the corporation. And then beyond that they were actually . . . had clear title to their home by themselves.

And through that approach, a whole number of aspects presented themselves. Families that had been living in poor quality homes and moved every six months to a year were suddenly in a stable environment. They knew that there was some hope into the future, that the place that they were living was the place that they were going to be living for a number of years.

And what they've found, Mr. Speaker, is that the children that were living in that home were now able to go to the same school for several years in a row. And that enabled the school to develop a plan, diagnose some of the concerns, stabilize them, bring them up to grade level. When that happened, a lot of

behaviour problems started to dissipate. The families started to live a little bit more in harmony. The parents — a lot of cases it's single-parent families — they were no longer having to deal with a crisis each and every week. The home life had become stabilized. They were then able to go out and find work and find a job. Sometimes a part-time job, sometimes it worked into full-time.

And what they found, Mr. Speaker, this wasn't about buying a home; this was about building a family. And these people were suddenly able to now not just be recipients of help from other people. They were then in a position to mentor and help other people. And it was really gratifying, and it was just a wonderful experience to be able to be part of that process, to see Quint Developments start from an idea and develop into something very positive.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the radio the other day, and they were talking about the ancient city of Troy. And the question was, why was the ancient city of Troy abandoned? It had a lot of its benefits. And near as they can figure is that the waterways were not kept up. And when the waterways were not kept up, those waterways became marshes — not unlike the big dig out in front of this building, Mr. Speaker. And when the marshes occurred, then the mosquito population started to increase. When the mosquito population started to increase, the incidences of disease-borne illnesses like malaria started to increase, and people were getting sick and people were dying. And so people started to avoid the city, and the city was a place that no one wanted to be or live in. And so that city started to die, and did die and was abandoned. So based on just that one simple aspect, a whole functioning city ended.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of unintended results with negative things like that. But in this case with the HomeFirst program, there'll be a whole lot of unintended positives that people don't realize when they start down this road. This is very good money invested, and I'm very proud to be able to stand in support of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, we're very proud for the social housing we've built up in this province. It's an invaluable resource to many seniors, and it's an important leg up to families who face challenges. We're going to make sure that this resource operates as efficiently as possible so it can be sustained despite the huge drop in federal government funding. We want to make sure that this resource is targeted to the people who can benefit most from it. HomeFirst is part of government's commitment to ensuring Saskatchewan is the most affordable province to live, work, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read again the motion that was put forward by the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre:

That this Assembly support HomeFirst, the government's new provincial housing initiative, and recognizes the ongoing services that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand in this Assembly today and speak in favour of the HomeFirst housing strategy. And in conclusion, I will be supporting the motion put forward by the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre. Thank you, Mr.

Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join in the debate today, especially after the recent comments by the Premier on the constructive nature of the opposition. I'd like to expand on that and applaud the government for their HomeFirst initiative.

I think that the nature of individuals who have need for low-income housing to move to a situation where they have ownership of the house . . . and the member from Elphinstone alluded that there would be 500 people available for this program this year. That is an excellent step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to see the current NDP government moving in this direction, towards home ownership because on their Web site as . . . given direction from this current Premier, as of February 15, there's still a document that calls for the pulling down of the present capitalist system with its injustice and on and on and on. And I'm glad to see that they're making the move towards recognizing that private property is something that should be recognized as a human right and a necessity for a good society.

Even the country of China, Mr. Speaker, has come to recognize the necessity for private property as a basic human right. And we're glad to see that after that jurisdiction — the people's republic — that the NDP in Saskatchewan is finally following suit and coming on board.

De Soto the economist, Mr. Speaker, wrote a very good work on . . . called *The Mystery of Capital*: why capitalism works in the West and fails other places. And the basis of the findings was that the necessity to have capital to be able . . . the need to be able to leverage, Mr. Speaker. And to be able to leverage, Mr. Speaker, there needs to be a system of ownership and title. And, Mr. Speaker, for the vast majority of persons the world over, the first step to ownership and title exists within their homes. Their homes are usually the very first piece of property that anyone owns.

(11:30)

It is exceedingly important to produce entrepreneurial societies that you have home ownership as an aspect of this. Because to be able to go forth, Mr. Speaker, and acquire capital through the form of loans to start a business, security is required. And security by a financial institution has to be something that is recognized as property, that is recognized in a registered system, free and clear of liens, and then a value can be assigned to it.

And through this, Mr. Speaker, we have a system, a capitalist system, that allows for a piece of property that is dormant, the equity to become active. And that is exceedingly important. And we see how that moves from basic property into being able to be leveraged. And then from leverage, we have a very advanced systems now with futures and derivatives and any

number of systems that allow for money to take on more than one form at one time and thus exponentially increase.

Where the real importance of this law is relative to the HomeFirst, Mr. Speaker, is that individuals who are on low-income budgets and are in need of assistance will be able to make the move into the ownership of their own homes. And from this, Mr. Speaker, it means that they will have equity in their homes, and at some point they may wish to begin a business venture of whatever kind of nature.

Having equity in their home, Mr. Speaker, they can approach a credit union. They can approach a community group. They can approach a charter bank and say, here's my idea; I would like to go forth into the economy and I'm going to need X number of dollars to get my idea going forward. I think it's a good idea; I think I'll make money in it.

And the institution will say to them, do you have any equity? And they'll say I now . . . I have a home, and I'm confident enough that I will put up some of the equity in my home or the title to my house to go forth with my business. And as a lender, Mr. Speaker, that gives a great deal of confidence to the financial institution because these people are going to put everything they have on the line to grow their business and to grow the economy.

So having home ownership, Mr. Speaker, is an excellent, excellent idea, and we do applaud the government for moving forth on this. It is however, Mr. Speaker, . . . I'd like to read the motion as it's written:

That this Assembly support HomeFirst, the government's new provincial housing initiative, and recognizes the ongoing services the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides to the people of Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, towards the end of my speech I'd like to move the following amendment, and that following . . . the words be added after people of Saskatchewan so the intent of the Bill staying completely the same, and we add the following words:

And further that this Assembly commend the management of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation for seeking ways to save taxpayers' dollars including purchasing its natural gas from a lower cost alternative.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen in the last month that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has gone forth in the natural gas procurement that they use across their system and they have purchased their natural gas from CEG Energy Options. And this comes, Mr. Speaker, due to the fact that they were able to save money per gigajoule rather than what was able to be supplied by SaskEnergy.

This of course is in spite of the fact that the NDP promised to have the lowest utility rates in the country and obviously SaskEnergy can't meet this objective and may be in fact overcharging its customers. However we see in this government that the Sask Housing Corporation came to terms with the fact that there may be a savings to be had by using a private sector gas deliverer and thus went to it. And we think that those types

of innovations by the government are good.

So it's nice today, Mr. Speaker, to see the current government moving away from its dogmatic roots of socialism and communal ownership. So much of what the rest of the world has moved away though, it's taking Saskatchewan far longer. And many of the persons in this province suffer because of this dogmatism that somehow communal ownership will merge with globalization; that somehow a pie-in-the-sky, Tommy Douglas fantasy world is going to move us into the next century — strong, with good health care, with quality educations, with farms.

It's nice to see the government moving towards a system that recognizes the private property, free enterprise; that the Government of Saskatchewan should not be first and foremost owning everything — that it should be out of the way, Mr. Speaker. That at the basis of it that home ownership for persons with low income should not necessarily stay within the purview of the state, Mr. Speaker. That if individuals really do want a leg up, that they be given the chance to have private property, to own private property.

And we commend the government again for recognizing this and we wish them all the success in the new first house . . . HomeFirst rather model. Because if this is successful it would be, in the position of this side of the House that we would encourage groups like Habitat for Humanity, where individuals should have housing. They should have housing that is adequate. They should have housing that provides dignity to the families and the communities that participate in them.

In our country of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in our province — I was on the tractor about four years ago listening on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio about housing conditions on a certain reserve in Saskatchewan. And it broke my heart, Mr. Speaker, because there were children living in a trailer where the floor had rotted out. Such a situation, Mr. Speaker, is not acceptable in Saskatchewan or in Canada.

And we have seen as I mentioned before, DeSoto has ascribed to why capitalism works when you have a system of private properties. We've seen what's happened with our First Nations persons in our . . . in the province before they were allowed to have private property on a reserve system, and some of the problems that that has caused, Mr. Speaker.

We applaud once again the HomeFirst initiative and mainly, first and foremost not because it helps people only, but because it helps them to have a home and to own a home. So, Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Southeast:

That the following words be added after "the people of Saskatchewan":

And further that this Assembly commend the management of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation for seeking ways to save taxpayers dollars including purchasing its natural gas from a lower cost alternative.

I so move.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Kindersley, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Southeast:

That the following words be added after “the people of Saskatchewan”:

And further that this Assembly commend the management of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation for seeking ways to save taxpayers dollars including purchasing its natural gas from a lower cost alternative.

The debate will continue concurrently on the motion and the amendment.

I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to be asked to speak on this matter. This side of the House recognizes the importance of independence, the pride and dignity that one takes in acquiring ownership of their own home. Acquiring and owning any real property is a significant step forward, and it’s a great step towards realization of personal growth and trying to be able to control one’s own life, their own agenda. This type of activity is welcomed by the members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

It’s essential, however, that there are supports for the care and the maintenance and upkeep of those homes. The pride of ownership should not be tarnished by homes that become ramshackle, rundown, and otherwise not well maintained.

So if the members opposite put forward legislation to enable this, it is our hope and expectation, Mr. Speaker, that there will be sufficient support mechanisms with it so that the individuals that do acquire their own homes are able to continue to maintain that kind of pride and that kind of dignity and that kind of control over their own life and their own agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat surprised when I saw this come forward from the members opposite because it promotes home ownership. And this is something I think that the members opposite probably took right out of Maggie Thatcher’s agenda, because during the Thatcher era in Britain, a lot of low-cost tract houses were converted to individual ownership with a great deal of success, Mr. Speaker. The people that acquired those homes did a great deal to try and improve the area of the city, that area of downtown London that was problematic, and did so with a great deal of success.

So with that type of thought we hope that this program goes forward. We are also pleased that this program will address the needs of the elderly, will address the needs of families, and will address the needs of the disabled.

One of the troubling aspects, Mr. Speaker, is this year we saw that the budget for Sask Housing was cut from \$23.5 million to \$14.8 million. Mr. Speaker, this poses some significant concern to the ability of Sask Housing to be able to maintain and continue this type of program.

We have seen more than a decade of economic and social decline under the NDP government. Unfortunately, too much of it is in the Premier’s own riding of Saskatoon Riversdale. We have seen high crime and a great deal of problem with fetal alcohol, with education, and everything else. And it is our hope that by giving the funding that will go towards housing that they will also deal with the other important social issues that are there.

It’s a positive step and we await to see the NDP plans for education, health, substance abuse, job creation, and the other serious issues that face this province, and in particular the Premier’s own constituency of Saskatoon Riversdale. Because that, Mr. Speaker, is the area of the province where those problems are most significant and are most visible.

This program will help inner city neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods have significant issues with crime and with other things.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Premier and I’d like to remind the members opposite of an election commitment that they made to provide 200 more new police officers to the province. They have as yet failed to fulfill that commitment. There are over 50 officers yet to come. The crime issue in both Saskatoon and Regina is very significant.

There are serious issues with the ability of the 911 system to be able to deliver adequate and prompt response. And, Mr. Speaker, if these homes . . . and we are going to maintain the pride of ownership, it is imperative that there be proper policing services in place for that. So I want to remind the members opposite that that is a commitment that they made and that we expect fully that they will follow through.

We also note the amendment — and I’m pleased to second the member from Kindersley’s amendment to this motion — for Sask Housing trying to obtain the most competitive low-cost natural gas rates. Unfortunately, at the present time, Mr. Speaker, the low-cost rates are not available from SaskEnergy. They are currently available from CEG Energy Options.

This government prior to the election committed to providing the lowest cost bundle for utility rates in the country. This has not happened. And particularly when one of their own Crown corporations is going forward and is dealing elsewhere to buy natural gas, I find it a strange irony that the homeowners and the rest of the province can’t avail themselves of this because CEG Energy Options and other private suppliers are not available to individual consumers. It’s only available to corporate . . . (inaudible) . . . So I am pleased the Crown utility is able to avail themselves of low-cost opportunities.

And what I would like to see is SaskEnergy become and remain competitive. It’s unfortunate when companies like SaskEnergy, hotels, apartments, and other business have to go out of province to try and seek energy options.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have had little faith in the NDP. Their dreams have been shattered. There have been a lot of broken promises. And, Mr. Speaker, some of the people that will be the recipients of this program are some of the most vulnerable citizens — seniors, children, and disabled.

The thing that will affect these people that will want to get them to stay in this province will be if there is a commitment not to close hospitals, if they will do something to reduce waiting lists, if they had not raised the PST. And if they had come up with a scheme or a plan to deal with the high crime rates and some of the highest property tax in this country. We have seen layoffs of firefighters. We have seen the closure of rural service centres.

(11:45)

And now, Mr. Speaker, some of the people that will be residing in these homes will be the ones that will want to use our provincial parks. Next week, they're going to go out and have to pay \$3 to light a fire for a wiener roast, Mr. Speaker. Not a huge expense, but the people that will want to use this low-cost affordable housing that will come out of this program are the very people that will go out, be most likely and most needing of wanting to have a vacation and using Saskatchewan parks; that, if not for the extensive lobbying on this side of the House, the parks would not even be open next week, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has wanted to play business. They have wanted to deal with dot.coms, out-of-country investments, and a long litany of losses, collapsed and failed businesses. And I'd like to read some of them.

We have lost \$28 million on SPUDCO . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. The member in 75 minute debate, as in other debates, should relate his remarks to the motion at hand. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, this government would have a great deal more money to put into low-cost and affordable housing — they would've had \$17 million more to put into low-cost housing — if they didn't put it into Coachman Insurance, Mr. Speaker.

They would've had a large number of other money if their list of things . . . (inaudible) . . . approaching \$100 million that could be used for a greater amount of low-cost affordable housing that we expect this government to do this.

This is not a government that should be playing with and dealing with out-of-province investments. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has no plan, no vision, no direction, and is devoid of an ability to grow and develop the province.

Mr. Speaker, I was troubled earlier today when I heard the Learning minister quote from John Kenneth Galbraith that the choices the government have to make are between disastrous and unpalatable. To make a statement like that, Mr. Speaker, flies in the face of what the government is trying to do with this option.

It is this type of option they're putting forward that will give those families hope and those families a desire and a willingness to stay in this province. To hear a minister say that his choices that he has to deal with are somewhere between disastrous and unpalatable is a sign of a minister that has given

up, and sign of a government that has given up and it's completely out of ideas and completely out of a sense of direction to go.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to see the exodus of our young people, the people that will be sponsoring and paying for this type of housing program. Those people will leave the province. Those are the very people that will become our best and brightest individuals in the future. They will become our taxpayers. They will be the people that will lead businesses. They're the people that will create jobs and get the economy growing. And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, when those people leave they are not likely to come back. And that is a problem for this type of program and for the sustainability of this program for the long term, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are other things that have to be done in conjunction with this program, and we recognize some of the initiatives that have been taken. Some of those things include the School^{PLUS} program, community schools, and a variety of other educational programs that have to work hand in hand with this type of program to make the future of our province better for all of its citizens, including those that are most in need.

Mr. Speaker, it's going to take a strong intersectoral approach, more than just what is put forward in this particular plan. And we want to see what else is coming forward from this government.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to second the amendments from the member from Saskatoon and Kindersley, and I look forward to seeing what the other members put forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to enter into this debate. We're talking today about one of the most pivotal programs for the future of our province.

Mr. Speaker, building independence for those in our community and in our society who need help to build to reach that independence, Mr. Speaker, is extremely important. And this is one very, very important platform for which people can move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's about creating an environment where quality housing is expected within our communities. It can be sought after and affordably achieved by those people in our communities. It is a model, Mr. Speaker, that will see many, many people have the opportunity to own homes that would never have been able to own homes otherwise, Mr. Speaker.

This new housing policy will therefore be an important link in the province's overall economic and social development efforts, both now and in the future. It will build for us new opportunities for many young people, create new hope, optimism, and enthusiasm for many families for the future. Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . or Mr. Speaker, it's all part of building for those in our province a brighter future, more opportunities, greater opportunities for independence in sometimes very difficult circumstances. And making life better for our families

Mr. Speaker.

Approximately 10,000 additional low-income family households and 1,600 additional persons with disabilities will be assisted through housing supplements beginning in 2005, Mr. Speaker. That's an incredible accomplishment. That represents an investment of up to \$39 million, Mr. Speaker. It's an increase of 38 per cent over current households that have those types of services available to them.

Beginning in 2004, a total of 2,000 more affordable housing units will be delivered by 2008 to the centenary affordable housing program — a total investment of \$104 million, Mr. Speaker.

This government is putting its money where its mouth is. It is putting forward new programs for the people of the province, for those who are the most vulnerable in our society. Mr. Speaker, that's what the role of government's about.

And, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity is presented through this new initiative for 500 family households to become homeowners. Through home ownership people develop a sense of independence, a sense of stability, a sense of well-being that they may not have otherwise, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, owning a home, having an asset, having something that is your own is something that all people in our society strive for, Mr. Speaker. And something that this government is moving forward with to help those in our society.

Starting this year 3,000 homes and rental units will be repaired over the next five years. Mr. Speaker, that represents an investment of over \$16 million in repairing and making sure that those homes that people live in are of high-quality standard, Mr. Speaker, helping people in our communities to live in better quality housing. Because linked to quality housing are issues of health care, education, well-being of children, Mr. Speaker. All things that are important to this government and to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, it will also create 3,100 additional person-years of employment in Saskatchewan. And in our economy employment's an important issue. It creates employment, creates dollars within our province which are spent within the province, Mr. Speaker. So it's good for the province in every aspect.

I want to talk for a few minutes about the goals of the HomeFirst program. It's about improving quality housing of low-income households in our province, Mr. Speaker. It's about creating a sense of independence for people. It's increasing housing self-reliance among low- and moderate-income households. It's about helping the private, public, and community housing sectors respond to housing needs of all our Saskatchewan households regardless if they're in urban Saskatoon, urban Regina or in, Mr. Speaker, Gull Lake, Saskatchewan or Beechy, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

It's about expanding the stock of affordable rental and owner-occupied housing. It's about providing decent housing for seniors in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's about coordinating housing policies and programs with economic development planning and neighbourhood revitalization

strategies, Mr. Speaker. It's about working together with communities and people in those communities to provide new and vibrant affordable housing in their communities, Mr. Speaker. It's a goal that all members of this Assembly should cherish, Mr. Speaker, and should support.

What are the priorities of the HomeFirst program, Mr. Speaker? It's about making quality housing more affordable through new income supports and rental opportunities. Mr. Speaker, it's about bringing up the bar — raising the bar — making sure that people who are renting . . . low-income people renting housing in our communities, Mr. Speaker, have quality housing so that they live in better accommodations, so that their children are raised in better standards, Mr. Speaker.

Through no fault of their own many people in this province live in housing that none of us would like to see them have to live in. And, Mr. Speaker, we're going to raise that bar. We want families to live in better standard housing, Mr. Speaker. And that's what this program's about. It's about creating home ownership opportunities for low- to moderate-income families through a range of housing options. We want people to be able to buy those accommodations, Mr. Speaker. We want them to buy homes. We want them to have home ownership, Mr. Speaker.

We want to revitalize and stabilize the inner city neighbourhoods and northern communities through home construction and repair. Mr. Speaker, we want to partner with the construction industry and the home builders in the province to build new quality homes for low-income families. We want people to have a quality and standard of living that is better than what they may experience today. And more importantly than that, Mr. Speaker, we want them to own that house. We want them to feel proud of their home.

Mr. Speaker, we want to help families, seniors, and persons with disabilities live independently through strengthened housing supports. Mr. Speaker, any one of us today could become disabled just by a chance of God. Any one of us could be struck by a car, could be struck with a disability . . . a debilitating disease, and end up disabled, Mr. Speaker. We need to ensure that those who are afflicted with these types of disabilities, Mr. Speaker, can live as independently as possible. And we need to strengthen those supports for those that are disabled in our communities.

We need to promote a green environment through energy-efficient housing. We need to take the concept of energy efficiency and help families renovate those homes so that as we put money into improving the housing sector, we also make them more energy-efficient so that we can save on future dollars as well, Mr. Speaker, and make those homes as energy-efficient as possible.

We want to ensure the sustainability of government-assisted housing through effective and efficient management practices. We want to work with community organizations. We want to work within the province, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that affordable, sustainable housing is there.

And we want to create efficiencies in housing markets across the province, work with home builders, work with housing

corporations in fact to create efficiencies in the market to help people have greater access to homes.

We want to involve individuals, community organizations, municipalities, business, industry, First Nations and Métis organizations in all stages of both policy and program development, Mr. Speaker. We want to create a very inclusive housing program, very inclusive housing strategy that meets the needs of the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, as I wrap my remarks up, I want to point out to the members opposite that these services are available to the people of the province because of a very hard-working Crown corporation called Sask Housing. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to the people of the province, Sask Housing is one of the many, many Crown corporations that the members opposite had talked about getting rid of, Mr. Speaker. They're not essential.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, one of our family of Crown corporations in this province, delivers very essential services to the people of this province. It provides low-income housing. It provides opportunities for people to move towards greater independence. And now, Mr. Speaker, in the future it's going to provide the opportunity for people to move to home ownership as well.

Mr. Speaker, that is a service to the people of the province, a service to the communities, and a service to our province. And, Mr. Speaker, I think all members of this House should support the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation in its efforts to improve our well-being. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rising cost of housing is a great concern to all people of Saskatchewan. It seems to be a vicious circle — as wages go up, so does the cost of housing. Housing costs continue to escalate and as a result fewer people can afford a home.

There is a feeling, a special feeling that goes with owning your own home. People will strive, people will willingly suffer, people will do just about anything to own their own home. I believe that owning your own home makes you stronger, gives you more self-worth and as a result makes you a better person. Of course these can be achieved without a home, but I believe it can be a catalyst in the right direction.

(12:00)

I also believe that something for nothing doesn't work. You cannot give a person a house and say it's yours. There has to be input by the owner. The term sweat equity is often used and it applies 100 per cent here. You have to be part of the system. You have to put something into the process to get something out.

We see it with our own children. If you give them a bicycle or if they are part of the purchase, not necessarily 100 per cent of the purchase, but part of the purchase and responsible for its upkeep, the bicycle will last longer than the gift bicycle.

Mr. Speaker, the problem that I see is not in the housing plan, I'm in favour of that. The problem is in the downloading of the little guy, the low-income people. How can all these programs help when he is being taxed to death? How can the little guy get ahead if he can't afford today, much less tomorrow? To put it into simple terms, to bring it down to a farm boy's level, Mr. Speaker, you can't suck and blow at the same time.

You can't have the highest taxes in Canada for low-income people and then say you want to help them buy a house. You can't have high and unfair property tax and then say you want to help them buy a house. You can't promise the lowest utility rates in Canada and then not deliver. You can't cut care beds and hospitals and say you want them to buy a house. You can't reduce the spending of Sask Housing from 23.5 million last year to 14.8 million and then say you want to help them buy a house. You can't keep breaking promises that this government has made and then say you want to help them buy a home.

Mr. Speaker, you can't suck and blow at the same time. You must give people a fair and equal shot at owning their own home. Don't give them with one hand and take with the other. The government must get its priorities right. Poor people don't need a handout; they need a hand up.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, a good home . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order please, members. Order please, members. I would ask members to wait their turn to speak. Right now I want to recognize the member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and we will let them have their turn. Yes.

A good home is vital to individuals and family health and well-being, provides stability, sense of pride, and sense of belonging. It's also a starting point to independence and lasting participation, and social and economic life of a community. People need to be empowered to find their own solutions to their problems, and in doing so foster their own independence and personal growth.

This initiative is certainly welcomed by members on this side of the House — obvious benefits for children and families, the disabled and the elderly. We recognize this is a significant change in delivery of housing programs in the province that should hopefully promote individual choices, personal accountability, economic and social independence.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the three members from this side of the House have said, we certainly support the motion and applaud the good work that the Housing Corporation is doing.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's more to just having a home to live in. People need to have quality jobs. They need quality employment opportunities — something to get up for in the morning and go to, to have a future, to have hope. And that's

where this government, Mr. Speaker, has failed.

Certainly they like to crow about the recent increase in employment numbers and we certainly don't disagree that it's good to see the employment numbers growing, but let's look from where we started from.

This government talked about creating 30,000 new jobs way back in '99, and I think they finally got to about 6,000 new jobs since 1999. So that's a pretty pitiful record when you compare what the province of Manitoba is doing and other provinces across this province, Mr. Speaker.

And that's one thing I hear from those members in our society who are disadvantaged and haven't had the opportunities and haven't had the housing and living conditions that many other members in our society enjoy. They say it's fine; certainly we need to have better housing and living conditions, and certainly we want to own our homes, but we also need a job to go along with that. And that's where this government has failed miserably. They haven't created the environment. We haven't attracted the investment in this economy to create those jobs, and quality jobs. It's one thing to say we've got jobs, but what type of jobs are they? Are they quality jobs; are they jobs that people can build careers on, full-time jobs? Are call centre jobs — not to demean those types of jobs, but are they career jobs?

I hear from many working people who say, we need quality jobs that we can build our careers on, not just to get us through a few years of having a paycheque, and then we don't know where our future is again, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, that's where this government has failed miserably in the economic policies that they've pursued. They put all their eggs in one basket and it's not working for them.

And even in the best of times, where we see economic growth in other areas of the province, because of the poor planning, poor management of this government, this province stumbles on in spite of that government, Mr. Speaker. And we have to address those situations and help people with good quality jobs so that they can buy their own homes, maintain their own homes, Mr. Speaker, and have a full and productive life and have a future for their children. So that their children can receive education that will lead to future successes, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The time for the speech portion of the 75-minute debate has elapsed. We'll now proceed to the 10-minute question and answer period. I recognize the member for Regina Elphinstone.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member for Kindersley. In the recent election, on page 16 of the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party platform, there's a section entitled, "Build more affordable homes." And part of this of course is the quality housing registry, which is fundamental to the program of homes first. Now, of course, homes first is just one part of a broader thrust in terms of addressing housing. The Minister of Justice has put forward some excellent legislation on safer communities and neighbourhoods. We're working in partnership with the inner-city community, partnership with the

feds and the municipality in Regina here and other groups, to make sure that we're going after substandard housing. But I guess we're on the record for this.

Where is it in the platform in the Saskatchewan Party that they were going to do anything about housing in the last election?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer the question from the member from Elphinstone, because it was essentially the Saskatchewan Party's platform that said we're going to grow the economy, and everybody can afford to build or buy their own homes.

This government, Mr. Speaker, seems to think that the answer always lies with the government, and that's been the problem for 60 years. Tommy's dream doesn't work, Mr. Speaker.

When we get right down to it, Mr. Speaker, why do we have low-income individuals in this province disproportionate to the rest of Canada? Why do we have it, Mr. Speaker, when we have the greatest set of natural and human resources in this country, Mr. Speaker? We have that situation, Mr. Speaker, because we have an NDP government caught up in a dogma of a man long dead and buried, and he's keeping our province down to this day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member for Regina Elphinstone. I'm talking about low-rental housing in my constituency. I have a number of them.

I will use the example of Kenaston, whose housing has been full for a number of years. For a period of two years they had vacancies, about four. And in that short period of time there was a meeting in Kenaston from the department wanting to move them four houses out of Kenaston. Right now they filled them since then. But there was immediate . . . there was a lot of pressure and a good fight from the community, or they'd have lost them houses.

So my question to the member is, do you support the removal of any low-rental houses out of rural Saskatchewan, or should they be left there, because it's an ongoing . . . In rural Saskatchewan some years there will be a waiting list, and maybe a couple of years there will be some vacancies, but they will be filled as time goes on.

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

Mr. McCall: — Listening to the member opposite's remarks, you know . . . and I guess we have on display today, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental contradiction that lays over in the other side.

Now the member from Batoche had talked about sucking and blowing, and I guess he knows of what he speaks, Mr. Speaker,

because they do that on a constant basis. You have the member from Kindersley saying that the private sector is going to take care of everything and that's what's going to set us free. Then you have the member from Arm River-Watrous getting up and saying that, you know, we've got to micromanage things just down to this infinite level.

So it's interesting that, you know . . . To get back to the member from Kindersley, he talks about how there was no need for any mention of housing in their platform. You know, we had a plank on housing, the Liberals had a plank on housing. When it came to the Saskatchewan Party, the silence was deafening. So they had nothing to say about housing during the election.

But now we have the member from Arm River-Watrous getting up and making these inflammatory statements, Mr. Speaker. I think, I think . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Kindersley. Mr. Speaker, my question is simple. Does the member from Kindersley support the continued existence of social housing in Saskatchewan for low-income seniors and people with disabilities and others?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Regina Dewdney for the question. And I would say on the record so that he is very clear, yes. I know that he's not accustomed to having straight answers come in this House, but that's because he sits on that side of the House during question period.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, government does have a role to play in all of our lives. We live in a democracy. It is the nature of what extent that role should be, Mr. Speaker.

It is a tragedy that we have the level of low-income individuals that exist in this province. It is a tragedy that our First Nations individuals in this province have been robbed of their heritage and often live below the poverty line with social problems, with problems around crime.

And I, Mr. Speaker, once again will reiterate, the reason for this, Mr. Speaker, is we've been locked in a dogma that has long been dead and buried.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, my concern and my question is directed to the member from Regina Elphinstone. I am concerned with the mechanics and the details of how such a program would work. I question the members opposite to

control the . . . their financial ability with any business. Their record with out-of-country investments is a disaster.

So my concern is how they are going to deal with the titles to these properties. Are they going to retain the titles? Are they going to take a mortgage? Are they going to have a planned repayment period or are they going to give the houses away? Are they going to do something to prevent speculation? Are they going to do something to prevent the houses from being transferred back and forth?

Is there any kind of a comprehensive plan to this? Or have they simply announced something that's going to be, yes this feels good, we're going to do it, and it will be no different than any of the other out-of-province or bizarre investments that this government has gone into.

So my question to that member is: how are they going to prevent speculation, or how are they going to protect the investment?

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

Mr. McCall: — It's interesting to hear the members on the other side talk about no idea because certainly in the election that we had just very recently, in terms of their platform, they had no idea when it came to housing.

The candidate I ran against in Regina Elphinstone-Centre, when it came to the good work of the north central community partnership — you know just recently referenced by the new Leader of the Opposition as somehow something they should consider when they go about stretching their comfort zone as worthy of consideration — you know she had no idea what was in the report. She had no idea of the work being done.

And I guess I've come to expect that kind of approach from the members opposite because when it comes to the success we've had with the neighbourhood home ownership program and the successful mechanism that's had, in terms of working with community delivery organizations — you know the announcement itself took place at Washington Park Place, which has been a very successful model. You know, there's more work to be done certainly, Mr. Speaker, but when it comes to housing, we're on the block and they're not.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(12:15)

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Kindersley. Does his party and does he personally continue to believe in the privatization of Sask Housing Corporation?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — I thank the member for Regina Dewdney for that important question. I'd like to bring it to the member's attention, as I stated earlier in my remarks, that today we're

giving housing first a thumbs-up. Well done.

As the Premier said today, we have a constructive opposition and we're following through with that, Mr. Speaker. This is in the right direction. This is privatization of houses for individuals. Individuals through this statement, Mr. Speaker, and through this motion, are going to be able to move from being low-income house owners to owning their houses privately.

And we said all the way through, all four members from this side of the House that spoke to this said, we're all in favour of that. So privatization for individuals owning their homes — bravo. Thanks for finally getting on the ball.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Kerpan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address my question to the member from Regina Elphinstone. The member from Saskatoon Southeast, just a couple of minutes ago, asked probably one of the most important questions that we could pose in this House here today: when it comes to the guarantees, what mechanisms are there going to be in place to guarantee those investors in those houses? And in fact what guarantees will there be for people who buy these houses that they will ever receive and retain ownership of them?

The record of the government of the day is one that is not strong on keeping their promises. And I'm concerned about, not only the people who . . . the taxpayers of the province who will be investing but also the people themselves who will own and try to purchase these houses, that they will be guaranteed ownership or equity in those houses.

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

Mr. McCall: — It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, in terms of . . . you know, there's a program called the neighbourhood home ownership program which has had some very good success in terms of securing that title for those low-income people to build that independence.

But again, Mr. Speaker, they don't know a whole lot about that over there, which is interesting because then they'll lecture you about Tommy Douglas and how he's done such wrong by this province.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in Elphinstone they voted for Allan Blakeney and they voted for Allan Blakeney for a reason, because it was about putting those supports in place to enable low-income families to make a better life for themselves and their children — which is exactly the kind of family I came from, Mr. Speaker.

So when it comes to housing, we're going to keep on making progress. We're going to keep on working with partners. And we're going to keep on moving ahead despite the sort of antics we get from the other side, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The time for the 75-minute debate has elapsed, and I would like to thank all members for their participation in the debate.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 2 — Proposed Inquiry on Health Care Facilities

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Mr. Gantfoer.

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to get up in the House again to talk about the motion put forward by my colleague from Melfort, and I would like to . . . I'm very pleased to be seconding the motion, but I'd like to go over the motion again one more time, Mr. Speaker. And the motion reads as follows:

That pursuant to rule 133(1), The Standing Committee on Human Services shall hold an inquiry and make recommendations regarding the future of health care facilities throughout Saskatchewan, and that the committee shall:

- a) obtain from the Department of Health a comprehensive list of all health care facilities scheduled for closure or conversion;
- b) hold public meetings away from the seat of government in order that the fullest representations may be received without unduly inconveniencing those desiring to be heard;
- c) hold at least one public meeting in each community with a health care facility scheduled to be closed or converted;
- d) have the authority to send for persons, papers, and records, and to examine witnesses under oath;
- e) have the authority to receive representation from interested parties and individuals; and
- f) have the authority to engage such advisors and assistants as are required for the purposes of the inquiry;

And, that this Assembly strongly urges the government to place a moratorium on all health care facility closures and conversions until such time as this inquiry has been completed and a substantive report presented to the Assembly pursuant to rule 133(4).

And, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'm very pleased to be seconding that motion.

Now one might ask, what precipitated a motion such as that? Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, what caused this to come about was in the government's own budget document that stated that there would be closures and/or conversions of long-term care facilities and health facilities in this province.

And we have discussed at great lengths in the last couple of weeks the credibility, the integrity, and the honesty of some of the

statements that have come out of this government. And that is what's caused this motion to come to the floor and to the forefront. And here's the prime example. Because, as I've already indicated, in the budget document it says there will be closures or conversions, and/or conversions of long-term care facilities and health centres in this province.

Now I would like to read from the government's own action plan on health. And keep in mind this is their own action plan, and what it says:

... (provides) better access to health care services, including primary hospital and emergency care ...

How does closures help that cause? How does closures provide better access to health care services including primary, hospital, and emergency care? Can anybody from that side of House tell me how closing facilities is going to provide better access to health care services? It's incredible. It is totally incredible that they would even consider this:

... (improves) health workplaces and (addresses) the shortage of key health providers ...

Well let's just have a look at how they're making out providing shortages ... or addressing shortages of health care providers. We know the nurses that have been cut in this province. We know the numbers are down. We know that there's a shortage of nurses. And this is in their own health care plan. They would address it. And how do they address it? More cuts. It doesn't make sense.

... (Improve) quality, efficiency and accountability (measures) ... to ensure ... long-term sustainability of our Medicare system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what are they doing to follow that in their own action plan? It is incredible what this government will do. They will say one thing and do the opposite. And we've got documented cases of that throughout this whole session about how this government, the integrity of this government is lost. The people of Saskatchewan know that the integrity of this government is gone. People of this province have a hard time believing anything that this government now says.

Mr. Speaker ... and here is the pièce de résistance of what this government said in their own action plan. This is in their own action plan, and it says a province-wide network of hospitals, no closures or conversion of hospitals. And I would like to repeat that: no closures or conversions of hospitals. Mr. Speaker, here we have, here we have an action plan put forth by this government as a be-all and end-all for health care in this province.

And yet in this budget document, it says, it says long-term care beds and health centres will be converted or closed. Now, how ... How can anybody on that side of the House sit there and explain this? How can it be explained? We're not going to close hospitals or cut services but — oh, by the way — we are going to close hospitals and cut services. There is a word for that, Mr. Speaker. There's a word for that. And the people of this province know the word for that. They know what this government is doing. And, Mr. Speaker, it is incredible.

Here again, in the action plan ... And this is in ... And I keep reminding people, this is in the government's own action plan, "Continuation of existing 74 health centres" Worth repeating, "Continuation of existing 74 health centres."

Well what did the budget document say? We're going to ... The government is going to ... this NDP government is going to close or convert the health centres, long-term care facilities. It is incredible what this government will do.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I want to address another little item related to this. And part of it, Mr. Speaker, goes to the fundamental of the five principles of health care. And one of the principles of health care is accessibility. Now we support the principles of the health ... five principles of the health Act. We agree with them. We agree that they should be accessible. But, Mr. Speaker, how, how can they be accessible to people if you close facilities? It's unbelievable. It's very hard to describe how they can stand on that side saying one thing and doing another.

The member of SPUDCO wants to get into the debate, Mr. Speaker. He's a good one for saying one thing and doing another. The member from SPUDCO should be just watching his p's and q's.

Mr. Speaker, here is something that I wish to quote, December 6, *Leader-Post* 2001, and this comes from the Premier, the Premier of the province:

If I were to select 20 of our smallest community hospitals and close them, I am told ... (a) saving would result in about \$14 million. That represents about two days of funding for the Department of Health ... The answer to financial sustainability is not to be found in the conversion or closure of small hospitals ...

That is by the Premier. That is by the Premier. And now we sit in this House day after day, and we talk about the integrity and the honesty that is put forth by people from the other side — again saying one thing and doing another. How could a person get up and say to the people of Saskatchewan there will be no closures in our health care system and turn around in a budget document and sneak it in, in the dead of night and say we're going to be closing and converting facilities?

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Premier at that time ... and this is what he said. He's listened to Saskatchewan people and is delivering. I wonder how many people in this province told the Premier he should close their health facility? How many people in this province did he go around to and talk to, and they stood up in front of the Premier and said, Mr. Premier, close our facility please. I don't think there was one person in this province that said to the Premier, we want our facility closed. And yet the Premier has the audacity to say he listened to the people and is delivering.

It is totally, totally unbelievable. And to go on, in this same document they talk about ensuring reliable access to hospital services. Saskatchewan needs a strong network of hospitals in all areas of the province, and this is from the Minister of Health, noting residents will have access to primary care services within a 30-minute drive from their homes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if any members opposite have spent any time out in rural Saskatchewan. You can't fulfill that direction right now. You cannot. So how is closing, how is closing more hospitals going to provide that 30-minute service? Right now in areas of my constituency, you're in excess of an hour right now, and that's before any future cuts are coming forward.

Mr. Speaker, I have about another hour of presentation here. But, Mr. Speaker, I know there's some important meetings that are going to go on, so at this time I would make a motion that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Wood River that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. This House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:30.

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