



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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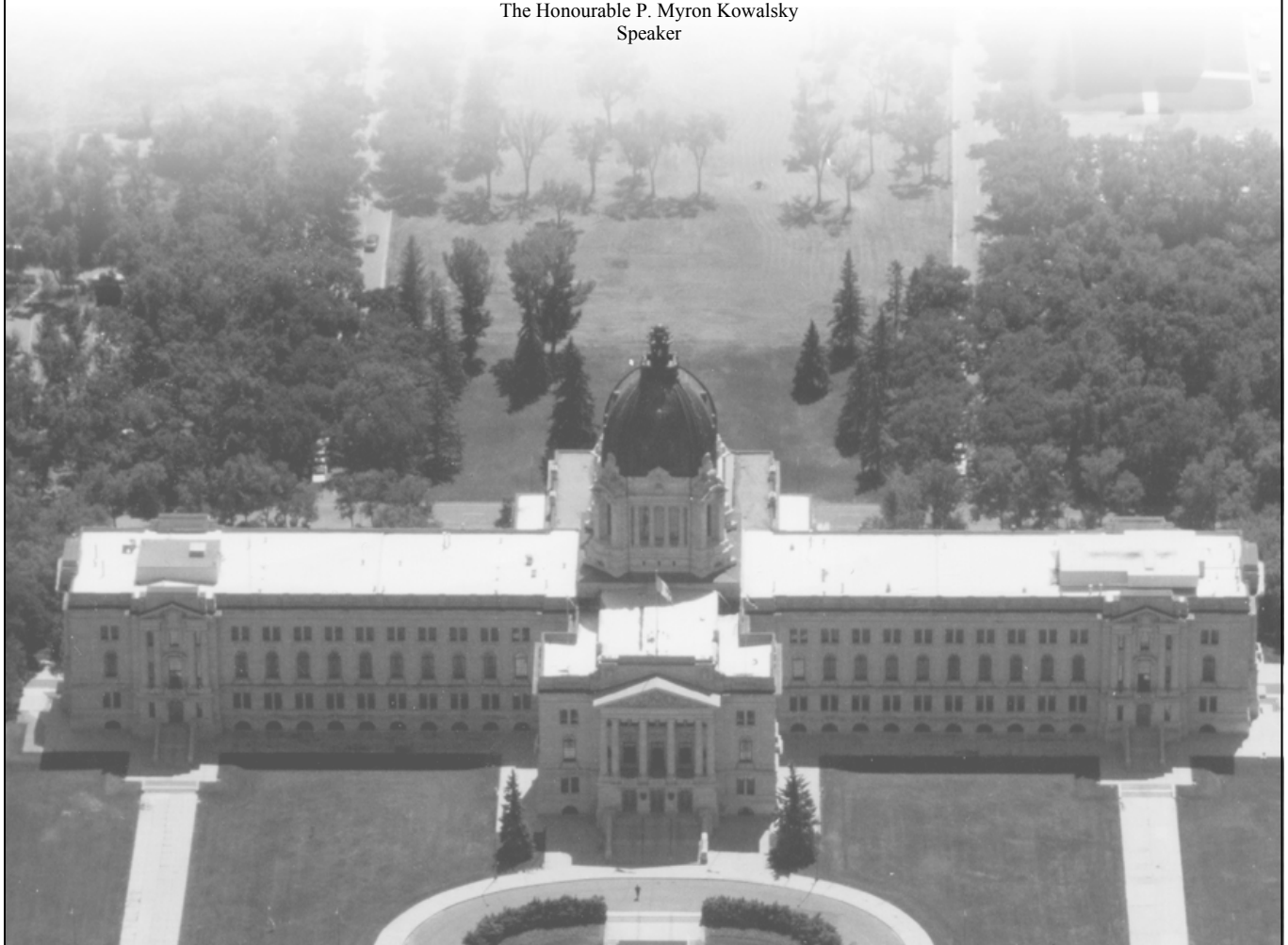
**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(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

<b>Name of Member</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>	<b>Constituency</b>
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 13:30.

Prayers

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege once again to present a petition on behalf of the community of Climax and as well Frontier and other surrounding smaller communities concerning health care delivery at the community of Climax. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary actions to ensure that the Border Health Centre in Climax remains a 24-hour facility.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have petitions once again signed by constituents from the communities of Climax, Frontier, and other smaller communities in the area.

**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 a possible closure or downsizing 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 all from the community of Craik.

I so present.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of mine that are concerned about the beer discount structure. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to reinstate the bulk beer discount structure cancelled in the recent provincial budget.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by folks from Estevan, Bienfait, and Torquay.

I so present. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens that want to have public hearings on closures and layoffs, Saskatchewan health care system, before they come in effect.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government through the legislative Human Services Committee to hold public hearings in each of the communities affected by the changes recently announced by the Minister of Health, prior to those bed closures, facility closures, and layoffs taking place.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This particular petition is signed by the good citizens of Kenaston.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Kerpan:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned with the downsizing and closure of public health care facilities without public consultation. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government through the legislature's Human Services Committee to hold public hearings in each of the communities affected by the changes recently announced by the Minister of Health, prior to these bed closures, facility closures, and layoffs taking place.

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

Mr. Speaker, presented on behalf of the good citizens of Kenaston.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise in the Assembly to present a petition on behalf of citizens of west central Saskatchewan concerned with the reduction and loss of health care. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this entire petition is signed by citizens of

Luseland, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition on behalf of citizens who in the past have been concerned about the dust on the gravel highway, although I don't think that's a problem these last few weeks. However the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and provide dust suppression on the gravel portion of Highway 99 between Junction 6 and Craven.

And signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the community of Craven and surrounding area.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of constituents concerned about the future of health care in southwest Saskatchewan. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government through the legislature's Human Services Committee to hold public hearings in the communities affected by the changes recently announced by the Minister of Health, prior to those bed closures, facility closures, and layoffs taking place.

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

Mr. Speaker, all of these signatories to this petition are from the city of Swift Current.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise with a petition against the closure of the Border Health Centre from a 24-hour facility to an 8-hour facility. Mr. Speaker, this has quite an effect in my constituency as I know it does from the member from Cypress Hills. 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 actions to ensure that the Border Health Centre in Climax remains a 24-hour facility.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed in total by the good citizens of Val Marie.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from citizens that are asking to improve cellular telephone coverage in their area. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular telephone service in the regions encompassed in the constituency of Biggar.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Biggar and district, I so present.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Regina Douglas Park.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, earlier this year I was presented with petitions by the Canadian food and restaurant association bearing the signatures of 135,000 people, and I am pleased to present this petition today. The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

And is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And I'm pleased to present those today, Mr. Speaker.

#### READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

A new petition concerning the Heartland Health Region, sessional paper 206;

And addendums to previously tabled petitions being nos. 167, 174, 182, 198, and 203.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Premier, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a very important guest, Mr. Speaker, who is seated in your gallery.

I'd like to introduce to members of the legislature Mr. Hans Schwandt, who is Consul General of Germany in Vancouver. With Mr. Schwandt is his wife, Dr. Heidi Schwandt-Boden, and they are accompanied for their visit to our province by someone well known to us, Dr. Gunter Kocks, who is the honorary

consul of Germany in Saskatchewan, and his wife, Ms. Judy Kocks.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Consul General is spending a number of days in our province. This morning the Minister of Agriculture, I believe, Minister of Industry and Resources, and myself, we've each had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Schwandt to discuss issues of mutual concern — and there are many.

I know that while he is here he will be visiting with the Lieutenant Governor. He will be visiting with you, Mr. Speaker. He will be visiting with the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, with Tourism Saskatchewan. He will visit here in Regina the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and be part of the Western Canadian Farm Progress Show and then travel to Saskatoon for meetings at the university and with some of the biotech firms.

There is much, Mr. Speaker, that we are doing with the great nation of Germany, both in terms of trade and tourism, and we believe there is much more that we can do. And so I would like all members to welcome the Consul General to our Chamber today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition, I want to join with the Premier and our government colleagues opposite in welcoming Mr. Schwandt here to the Legislative Assembly, as well as his wife, Dr. Heidi Schwandt-Boden, and Dr. Kocks as well to our Assembly.

And we do note a very busy itinerary as the Premier has pointed to, including later on a visit to the university of Saskatoon as well as the Farm Progress Show. And so on behalf of members on this side of the House, on behalf of the official opposition, welcome here and we hope your proceedings are certainly worthwhile for both Saskatchewan and Germany. Thank you for being here today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Ms. Morin:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

And I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Gunter Kocks was also the person I worked for at the German consulate here in Regina for many years. I certainly enjoyed my employment there and learned many, many things. And my experiences there have served me well over the years in terms of the work that I've done. So I thank you and welcome.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to members of the legislature I'd like to welcome 22 students from the town of Kenaston. Grades 6 and 7 have journeyed up today to watch the proceedings. With them are teachers Melanie Kerpan, Carole Butcher, and also some chaperones, Donna Friend, Debbie Sagen, and Norma Yelich.

I welcome you to your legislature here today and I hope that you will enjoy the proceedings, and I hope you will also enjoy the tour of the building that's coming up. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to the rest of this legislature a young man who is no stranger to the legislature but has returned from a year of studies and from a recent trip to Inuvik, and that is Kelsey James Rose, who is up in the west gallery.

Kelsey is attending Lester Pearson College and today he is accompanied by a friend, Karlis Rokpelnis, who is from Latvia and attends a sister college to Lester Pearson College, the United World College of the Adriatic. And they both recently were on a tour in Inuvik. And I hope that all will join me in welcoming them to this legislature. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Kerpan:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you today and through you today to the members of the legislature, on behalf of and in conjunction with the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook, a group of ladies that many, many of us heard over lunchtime, Mr. Speaker, singing in the rotunda.

They are ladies from the communities of Glenbush, Rabbit Lake, and Medstead. Their name is Take Note and, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce each of them individually — if they'll just give a little wave as I do that.

They are: the director, Cheryl Janzen; accompanist, Marjorie Klassen; Beth Pain, Joanie Barbondy, Jean Pauls, Brenda Hill, Peggy Pauls, Naomi Unger, Suzanne Fox, Sharon Harms, and Marlene Martens, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my connection with this group is through family. The group leader of Cheryl Janzen is my sister-in-law.

And just a bit of an aside — a success story — we have a young lady in the gallery who is part of the world famous Up With People group. Her name is Mrs. Beth Pain and she was part of the Take Note group. Mr. Speaker, a good success story for Saskatchewan — she is originally from Maryland in the United States and married a young man from Rabbit Lake and has made her home in Canada.

So we welcome all of you to your legislature, and I want to thank you very much for your participation and your great

music in the rotunda. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(13:45)

**Mr. Kerpan:** — And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I want to make a special note and a special welcome to someone who is part of the group of Kenaston students that the member from Arm River-Watrous introduced just prior to this. Part of that group is my wife, Melanie Kerpan, who is a teacher in Kenaston.

And, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask all members today to really be extra kind to me because I've been telling her how good an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) I'm becoming and I don't want anybody to spoil that story. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Good afternoon, and I also want to take note of the Take Note group choir. As Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation, I want to welcome you to the legislator as well . . . legislation as well. And I used to hang out around Medstead, Glaslyn, and stuff like that; I went to high school there. So I want to welcome you too.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the legislature a group of 30 students from Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan. They are in my constituency on the far west side of the constituency.

And I'd like to welcome them here today, and I'd like to tell the members of the legislature what a great place Willow Bunch is. It is a great draw for tourism. They have a beautiful golf course and they're the home of the Willow Bunch giant. And so I'd invite people, if they have the opportunity this summer, to travel to Willow Bunch and to experience what the community of Willow Bunch has to offer.

They are accompanied today by their teachers, Randy Sturtz and Janine Bouvier — I hope I said that correctly — and chaperone, Barb Mondor. And I'd like to welcome you all and look forward to meeting with you later.

I'd like all members to help me welcome them to their legislature.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Regina South.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you one person who of course most members in this Assembly know, is Sarah Mills with CJME radio, who is

seated in the west gallery.

But as important as Sarah is, it's actually a group of relatives or soon-to-be relatives who are with her today from Wales, who are joining this Assembly in the west gallery. I understand that visiting her are Herly and Rob Thorris from Wales, and if they'd just give a wave — there we go; okay, good, so we all know who we're talking about here. They're visiting their son, Malcolm Craig, who is Sarah's boyfriend. And of course we'd like to welcome them all here to the legislature today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this legislature, I'd like to introduce 19 grade 4 students from Westview School in Estevan. They are seated in the east gallery, Mr. Speaker, and they are accompanied by Mrs. Bolen and Mrs. Mainprize, and Mr. Johnson is a chaperone.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have visited these students at their school and I look forward to visiting with them again shortly. So I ask all members to join me in welcoming these students to their legislature. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Borgerson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests seated in the west gallery. These two young women have played a significant role in my decision to enter politics, and in fact played a significant role in my election, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, they play a significant role in my life. They are my daughters, Kirstin Borgerson and Erika Borgerson.

They take a very keen interest in politics, Mr. Speaker, and they're here of course to observe their father in the Assembly but also to observe and see if the members conduct themselves as well as I say we do.

So I'd like to ask all the members to welcome my daughters, Kirstin and Erika, to the people's Assembly. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

#### All Nations Healing Hospital Opens

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I, along with the Minister of Health and the member from Meadow Lake, had the honour to attend the official opening of the All Nations Healing Hospital in Fort Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Speaker, this facility will serve the entire community. It is a

model of a true partnership between the First Nations and non-First Nations people in Saskatchewan. The journey was not always easy. It was a process that required mutual respect, compromise, and consensus building. This was the vision shared by all nations; that vision has now come true.

Mr. Speaker, 91-year-old elder Agnes Cyr of Pasqua First Nation cut the ribbon to officially open the new health care facility. It replaces the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital that was built nearly 70 years ago.

The design elements of the new facility accommodate an approach to health care that recognizes the relationship between mind, spirit, body, and community. All patients, whether First Nations or not, will have the opportunity to benefit from all the services that are offered.

Mr. Speaker, the All Nations Healing Hospital is an example of our commitment to ensuring we have a strong network of health care facilities across the province. It is also an example of what we can achieve when we all work together for the common good. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also had the pleasure of attending, along with the members opposite, the official opening of the All Nations Healing Hospital in Fort Qu'Appelle on Saturday. And I must say it was certainly an impressive and memorable opening ceremonies. The First Nations people had their grand entry and their prayers and I found it very interesting and informative, Mr. Speaker.

But what I found most informative is the process that this new hospital travelled down to become reality. It was a hospital that was . . . The old hospital was transferred to the tribal councils of the area, Mr. Speaker, and as soon as . . . back in 1995. And as soon as they took ownership, they embarked on a plan to replace the old facility with the new facility that we see there today.

And what I found perhaps most interesting is the selection process they went through to come up with their new name. The holding company and tribal council chiefs felt that the name should . . . of Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital should stay with the old facility, Mr. Speaker. And so they asked the elders, what type of a process should we go through to find a new name for our new hospital? And the elder says, seek that information from the youth. And so they did.

They contacted your schools and the name of All Nations Healing Centre came from the young people, Mr. Speaker, and the young people participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony. And, Mr. Speaker, it is truly a unique facility. And the spirit of co-operation and partnership that took place is a template that we can apply across this province. And I congratulate all those involved with the new hospital, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### Gathering Our Artists Symposium

**Mr. Borgerson:** — Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon Centre and I recently had the pleasure of attending the closing gala of the first annual Gathering Our Artists Symposium hosted by Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, the symposium was a social, cultural, collaborative forum and it brought together some of Canada's finest Aboriginal artists to share their skills and experiences in the performing arts.

Mr. Speaker, the Saturday night gala was a fitting finale. It began with drummers and singers and the entry of West Coast dancers led by Gordon Tootosis, and this was followed by a who's who of Aboriginal performers.

Playwright Drew Hayden Taylor read from one of his short plays. Tomson Highway at the piano performed a composition from one of his plays. One of our Saskatchewan treasures, Andrea Menard, sang a song from her *Velvet Devil* show. And Maria Campbell and Tantoo Cardinal performed a reading from one of Ms. Campbell's plays accompanied by the music of John and Vicki Arcand, which ended with Tantoo Cardinal and Andrea Menard jiggling to fiddle music.

Mr. Speaker, it was a full evening of musicians, poets, actors, and playwrights — artists with powerful voices.

It reminds me of a quotation attributed to Louis David Riel:

My people will sleep for one hundred years but when they . . . awake, it will be the artists who (bring) . . . their . . . (spirits) back.

Mr. Speaker, we offer congratulations to the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company for their vision and determination in making this celebration happen, and our thanks for their contribution to the arts and to young people in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

### Inchkeith Celebration

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the pleasure of joining with a number of local people as well as many visitors from across Canada who came to dedicate a cairn to mark the location of a former community in our province. Mr. Speaker, members from the former community of Inchkeith and the school of Golden Ridge gathered together to reminisce and to dedicate a cairn and a plaque which would remind future generations of the fact that a little vibrant community was established in that area a number of years ago.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that we have seen so many small

communities disappear from our horizon. However this plaque and this cairn will just be a reminder of the many activities that took place. Mr. Speaker, that little community was the hub of activity for many years, as was the school which is 3 miles away down the road from the former community.

Mr. Speaker, this event would not have been possible if it wasn't for the women's, Inchkeith Women's Institute, formerly the Inchkeith women's homemakers guild, and the Golden Ridge community club. Mr. Speaker, the day was a day enjoyed by all as we dedicated the cairn, moved to the old school building, reminisced, and then gathered for supper.

Mr. Speaker, we had individuals all the way from Niagara Falls, Ontario, and Vancouver Island. So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that former residents of that area have moved far and wide in the country of Canada, and I want to extend congratulations and a special thank you to everyone who worked so diligently and so hard to make this such a successful day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

#### Canadian Rivers Day

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was Canadian Rivers Day, a day to honour the beauty and joy of our rivers, to celebrate our river heritage, and to show our appreciation for the natural resource. Mr. Speaker, fresh water is essential to life on earth, and I am proud to say that Canada is home to more than one-fifth of the world's water supply.

Mr. Speaker, national rivers day encourages all Canadians to learn about the heritage, vastness and diversity of Canada's rivers. It's a grassroot-driven event that provides education and action through celebration, and continues the traditions of our Aboriginal peoples in showing respect and admiration for our environment.

To celebrate our rivers, a variety of events were held across the country yesterday, including river cleanups, music festivals, canoeing trips, clean water workshops, historical enactments, and a campaign to raise \$500,000 annually to support and enhance community participation in Canadian Rivers Day. Here in Saskatchewan I along with many others had the pleasure of taking part in the Meewasin Valley Authority's second annual cruise and barbecue as we floated down the South Saskatchewan River on board a tour boat called the *Saskatoon Princess*. We all had a great time and learned some interesting facts about our own river.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's rivers represent adventure and discovery. They have moulded our identity and culture and landscape, and have played a critical role in linking us together as a country. From fur traders to explorers and settlers, the nation's rivers have provided transportation as well as communication routes.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in recognizing Canadian Rivers Day. And I encourage everyone to take part in

celebrating, commemorating, and preserving both Saskatchewan and Canada's spectacular bodies of water.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

#### Retirement of Dr. John Courtney

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize a political studies professor at the University of Saskatchewan that has decided to retire from his very successful career in academia. Dr. John Courtney joined the University of Saskatchewan faculty in 1965. This is his 39th year in the academic world. Dr. Courtney earned his Bachelor of Arts in 1958 from the University of Manitoba, his Master's of Business Administration from the University of Western Ontario in 1960, and his Master's and Ph.D. (doctor of philosophy) in political studies from Duke University in 1962 and 1964 respectively.

Dr. Courtney is a renowned expert on the institutions of electoral democracy, political parties, and representation. He has authored three books and has written dozens of journal articles on the Canadian political system and was a member of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission in 1987. Dr. Courtney has also testified before numerous parliamentary committees. Dr. Courtney has helped shape the department of political studies at the University of Saskatchewan and many young students — including the Leader of the Opposition and myself — not too, too many years ago.

I know Professor Courtney will be missed by the university, his colleagues, and his students. I would like to congratulate him on a very successful career and would like all members to wish him the best in his retirement.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

#### Recycling Program Provides Milk for Children

**Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new program launched by the Regina Food Bank is providing nutrition for children and keeping toxic substances out of the landfills. With a small t-h and a capital i-n-k, thINK Food and Phones-for-Food launched last week in Regina makes it possible for empty ink-jet cartridges and old cellphones to be recycled for money that will go directly to putting milk on the table for children.

Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest challenges of the food bank is being able to purchase milk. Not only does this program alleviate hunger and provide nutrition for children, but it's also environmentally friendly fundraising project for food banks. Residents can turn in their empty ink cartridges and old cellphones to one of the many sites in the city including the Regina Food Bank, city hall, SaskEnergy, the Lawson centre, and Purolator Courier. The used products are then transported to recycling centres in Ottawa and the proceeds are returned to



the food bank in the form of rebates. Mr. Speaker, approximately six litres of milk can be bought with every recycled cartridge or cellphone, and it's estimated the program will raise 50,000 to \$100,000 for the food bank.

(14:00)

This program can only be successful because of the people in the community who choose to participate. It's a reflection of the co-operative spirit in Saskatchewan and an example of what individuals working together can do to enrich the lives of our children and foster a greener environment.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues will join me in recognizing the Regina Food Bank and its partners for the innovative program and the positive impact it's having on our community.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### ORAL QUESTIONS

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

#### SaskTel Investment in Navigata

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister Responsible for SaskTel. In the year 2001, the NDP (New Democratic Party) government bought a Vancouver-based telco called Navigata Inc.. The company has operated as a wholly owned subsidiary of SaskTel since 2001 and has lost money every year.

In 2001 Navigata lost two and a half million dollars. In 2002 Navigata lost \$11 million, and in 2003 Navigata lost an additional \$11.6 million. Mr. Speaker, how much money does the minister expect SaskTel will lose in 2004 on Navigata Inc.?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SaskTel.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hear the opposition member say it's a good question. In fact, it is a good question. Mr. Speaker, that's rare.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say with respect to Navigata, Mr. Speaker, the member also correctly identifies the losses. But let me say that the investment is, first of all it's a platform for voice over Internet, Mr. Speaker, and it is believed by SaskTel that this investment will achieve great things for SaskTel in the years to come.

First of all it already saves, on an annual basis, \$7 million, Mr. Speaker, for the parent company, which is not reflected in those numbers that that member identifies here this afternoon.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Speaker, SaskTel's 2004 first quarter report indicated revenues were up at Navigata for the first quarter of this fiscal year, and it also says expenses at Navigata

were up in the first quarter.

Mr. Speaker, if the NDP is willing to report that both revenues and expenses are up at Navigata in the first quarter of 2004, then they probably should be willing to make public how much money Navigata will lose in the first quarter of 2004. Will the minister confirm that Navigata lost money again in the first three months of this year, and will the minister indicate how much that loss really was?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SaskTel.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my first answer, I also did not indicate that it is anticipated that saving to SaskTel as well again, which is not reflected in the question that the member asked, is expected to grow to some \$10 to \$12 million on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker, as the expenses grow so too do the revenues. Mr. Speaker, again, as SaskTel sees this investment as a very good investment because it is the platform for what they believe to be the technology of the future which is — it's the new world, Mr. Speaker — it's the voice over Internet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, SaskTel I think, if you look at their record of investments, contrary to what the members opposite will say, are one of the strongest if not the strongest telephone company in North America. Coming from a province like Saskatchewan that's something I think we should all be proud of.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, if SaskTel has been that strong and wants to maintain that position going into the future, they're really going to have to watch the kind of investments they get into.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's investment in Vancouver-based Navigata holdings has really been a disaster to date. Since 2001, the NDP has poured \$49 million into Navigata. And every year, Navigata has lost more money than the year before: a total so far, Mr. Speaker, of 21 ... I'm sorry, \$25.1 million of taxpayers' money. That's in the 28 months between September of 2001 and December of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, how much money does the NDP government expect to lose in Navigata Inc. in the first 6 months of 2004? We already asked about the first three months. And how much more money is the NDP planning to gamble in its failing Vancouver-based telco, Navigata Inc?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the minister for SaskTel.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Well thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Again I will repeat the answer I gave, Mr. Speaker. That is that first of all, in the numbers that the member asks, it has not reflected the savings, the annual savings that SaskTel achieves by making this investment.

Mr. Speaker, again also it is a platform we believe — or

SaskTel believes, I should say appropriately — for voice over Internet, and already they are venturing into that market in those areas, Mr. Speaker. This is . . . it is believed by I think any telephone company in the world probably, that this is the way of the future.

Now as I've said, you know, when I come to the legislature, again I wouldn't be surprised to see horses and buggies parked back in the members opposite's stalls, again, Mr. Speaker. But we've got to move forward in the world. There are chances sometimes you have to take, Mr. Speaker. But as I've said before as well, SaskTel's record will prove, I think, that the majority of the investments they have made have reaped substantial benefits for the people of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Speaker, page 42 of SaskTel's 2003 annual report makes the following comment on the financial risks associated with its money-losing portfolio of business gambles, and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

If management subsequently discovers that a particular venture within the portfolio is not expected to generate the value originally anticipated and will not be profitable within three to five years . . . the corporation will explore exit strategies.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has gambled \$49 million of taxpayers' money in its Vancouver-based telco, Navigata Inc.. And Navigata has lost every year \$25.1 million, and counting, since 2001.

Mr. Speaker, is the NDP considering an exit strategy for its money-losing investment in Vancouver-based Navigata Inc.?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the minister for SaskTel.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the answer to that question is of course we are not.

Mr. Speaker, let me say as well, you know, that member has I think a lot of integrity. The last time he got up and asked questions, it was with respect to what he believed, I think — and the research was probably not done very well from the opposition there, Mr. Speaker — but he believed that the overall revenues of the parent company were, I think, projected to be some four and a half million dollars. Well in fact he only had a bit of the information. It was only based on the hard line, and I think it was about \$4 million, as I remember.

But again, Mr. Speaker, you know, that question that was asked I think ties very well into the question the member asks today — that is that there is huge diversification going on within telephone companies. And not very many years ago, the majority of the income of SaskTel was derived as a result of long distance. It is almost non-existent now, Mr. Speaker. And it will be as a result of investments that SaskTel makes through Navigata and companies like that where they've diversified so they can bring to the people of Saskatchewan things like voice over Internet, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

### Minds Eye Pictures

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister Responsible for Investment Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, in 2001 the NDP government decided to get into the movie business by buying part of Minds Eye Pictures.

In October of 2002, Minds Eye Pictures signed a 10-year contract for office and production space at the government-owned sound stage in Regina. However, this past Friday, the government's movie company announced it was moving out of the government-owned sound stage because the rent was too expensive.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, how many months behind in the rent was Minds Eye Pictures as of last Friday? And how much does Minds Eye Pictures owe in back rent to the government-owned sound stage?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Investment Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's well-known in the media that Minds Eye has experienced financial difficulties. It's also known, Mr. Speaker, that Minds Eye is reorganizing itself so that it can continue to contribute positively to the growth of the film and video industry in Saskatchewan. And Minds Eye has vacated the premises, Mr. Speaker, as part of that reorganization of its financial affairs.

We welcome that from the point of view of government, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that we want Minds Eye — and I'm sure all members want Minds Eye — to be on a proper financial footing so that it can continue to employ people in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Minds Eye is part of a growing film and video industry in Saskatchewan that employs many young people who are trained for this industry, and we support its continued reorganization, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan today have paid a heavy price for the NDP's gamble into the movie business. Mr. Speaker, in 2001 the NDP government gambled 4.5 million taxpayers' dollars to buy part of Minds Eye Pictures. And by the end of 2002, the NDP had written off \$4 million worth of that business gamble as a dead loss.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that didn't stop the NDP from dumping another 1.5 million taxpayers' dollars into Minds Eye Pictures just months before the government's movie company filed for protection from its creditors and walked away from almost \$30 million in outstanding debts in July 2003.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, what is the total amount of money the NDP government has lost so far on its movie company, Minds Eye Pictures?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Industry and Resources.

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, the policies of this government, which have included investment in Minds Eye and have also included the film and video tax credit to employ young people, have meant that we have a film and video industry in this province which is several times bigger than it was just a few years ago, Mr. Speaker.

One of the objectives of this government, and overall it is succeeding, Mr. Speaker, is to build the film and video industry in this province. And, Mr. Speaker, people tell us, including the opposition from time to time, that we need to have policies that create attractive employment opportunities for young people in our province. Certainly the film and video industry is doing this.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition was opposed to this government's involvement in building a sound stage here in the city of Regina. But that sound stage, Mr. Speaker, has led to annual production volumes growing by leaps and bounds in this province, the current level about \$47 million per year, Mr. Speaker. If we listen to the naysayers in the opposition, we'd never have . . .

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

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister's arguments sound somewhat like the arguments the government had regarding the SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) debate in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, court records filed last July, when Minds Eye Pictures sought protection from creditors, indicate the NDP's movie company, Minds Eye Pictures, owed the Crown investment corporation \$1.5 million. Those court records, Mr. Speaker, also show that Minds Eye Pictures owed 367,000 to the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation and another 525,000 to SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation). Mr. Speaker, that's in addition to the NDP government's loss of 4.5 million, its entire initial investment in its movie business.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm the NDP government has now lost a total of at least 6.9 million taxpayers' dollars on its movie business gamble in Minds Eye Pictures?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Industry and Resources.

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, it's well known that Minds Eye Pictures has had financial difficulties. It's well known that Minds Eye Pictures is in the process of reorganizing itself.

And what we're going to do on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is continue in a positive way; through the film and video tax credit, through investment in the sound stage, and in other areas where we can possibly contribute to support the growth of the film and video industry in this province. Because just as, Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of SaskTel was saying a few moments ago, we have to move with the times and we have to recognize that the nature of telecommunications is changing.

We also have to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there are great opportunities for film and video production in Saskatchewan. A good example of this is the production of *Corner Gas* in Rouleau, Mr. Speaker. And I have to say that if we listen to the naysayers over there, Mr. Speaker, we'd never have this kind of positive new tech, high-tech development in our province, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister has done an excellent job of dancing around answering the question about the government's investment of taxpayers' dollars in Minds Eye Pictures and its cost to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the government's movie company, Minds Eye Pictures, has already cost taxpayers at least \$6.9 million. And, Mr. Speaker, court documents filed by last July show that Minds Eye Pictures has also walked away — get this — from almost \$30 million in debts to dozens of other private sector businesses in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: how much more money has the NDP government poured into Minds Eye Pictures in 2004 through all provincial government departments, agencies, and Crown corporations including Investment Saskatchewan?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(14:15)

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Industry and Resources.

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — You know, Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the opposition, who are opposed to anything the government does, we wouldn't have a sound stage in this city, we wouldn't have a sound stage in this province, Mr. Speaker. You wouldn't have a forestry centre in the city of Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. And I dare say, Mr. Speaker, if we'd listened to them over the years, we probably wouldn't have a telecommunications company in this province either, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, we don't listen to the naysayers in the opposition. What we do in a positive way is to try to work with people who are doing their best to build industry and build opportunities in this province, Mr. Speaker. And the men and women at Minds Eye have restructured; they're trying to move on in a positive way to continue operating, Mr. Speaker.

And the members opposite may want to kick them when they're

down, but we're not going to do that. We're going to keep working with them just as we do the other industries in our province, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

#### Treatment Facilities for Children with Autism

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend people throughout this province have learned the plight of the Brkich family from the Kenaston area. Greg and Diane Brkich, not our Greg Brkich, but Greg and Diane Brkich are leaving their jobs, their family, their friends, and their community to move to Alberta.

They're moving to Alberta so that their four-year-old autistic son, Gabriel, can get service that he requires. Mr. Speaker, Diane Brkich said that the service available here in Saskatchewan, and I quote, is "inadequate at best."

Mr. Speaker, I understand that there are six spaces at the Kinsmen child centre in Saskatoon specifically for pre-school-age children with autism. How many other spaces are designated within the province of Saskatchewan for children with autism?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism and other cognitive disabilities are clearly a concern for everybody, but especially parents, and also those of us who work within the health system. Saskatchewan Health and the regional health authorities across the province work to provide services for these children, and we work together with the education system. And so the children that are age five and under work within the health system and then as they move into the school system, they receive help there.

There are two programs that are primarily in the city. But there are also services that are provided through early childhood intervention programs, and these happen in 15 other communities across the province. There aren't a huge number of spaces, but we do try to provide the services for people.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Speaker, according to the Autism Society of Canada this is not the first time that families have left Saskatchewan for better services elsewhere. In fact some of our own MLAs have dealt with families that have had to make the same decision to go to Alberta to find better services.

There are currently 700 children with autism in this province. That's an increase of 159 per cent since 1998-99 and yet there is only one treatment centre here in Saskatchewan — that is in Saskatoon — with only six spaces. That is not nearly adequate to deal with the demand. Mr. Speaker, does the minister believe

that six spaces, only six spaces in Saskatchewan, can deal with the demand of 700 children with autism in this province?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that children in Saskatoon and Regina have access to the facilities here, as well as children from both the northern part of the province and the southern part of the province. As well there are situations where children who are younger than 5 years of age do participate in some of the school-based programs.

We know that we don't have a sort of a huge provision of this service as compared to our neighbour to the west, but we also know that we've been working very carefully with many people to provide services on a consistent basis to children with autism in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Speaker, according to the Brkich family the autism partnership program in Calgary will pair their son with an aid for 40 hours per week both inside and outside the home. This program runs year round, giving the family access to respite care if it needs it through certain evenings.

Mr. Speaker, here in Saskatchewan the family says they can only get 10 hours of therapy per week, and that doesn't include the summer months, Mr. Speaker. It's not adequate, it's not even close to being adequate. Diane Brkich says, and I quote:

Parents shouldn't be put in the situation where they feel . . . in order to get viable and ongoing and effective treatment . . . they (must) . . . move out of this province.

According to the Autism Society of Canada, Saskatchewan is only one of two provinces that is not proceeding and developing universal, effective treatment programs for children with autism. Mr. Speaker, when will this government start improving quality and access to Saskatchewan children with autism? When are these specific actions going to deal with the issue in this province?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, there are different ways of providing services for autistic children across the country. There are, as many of us know, court cases that are presently before the Supreme Court of Canada around the services that are provided in the province of British Columbia.

We continue to try to provide services on a basis in communities right across the province. We have challenges getting sufficient number of trained people to provide all of these services. But we have to continue to work with the Community Resources department, with the Department of Education, with local school boards, and with regional health authorities to try to provide services across the whole province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### Health Care Services at Climax

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Speaker, on Friday this past week, Mr. Speaker, the Premier stood in his place and voted against holding public hearings in places like Herbert, Davidson, and Climax, three communities of the province that have been hit hard by the NDP's latest round of health care cuts.

A few minutes later, people from those communities let the Premier know exactly what they thought about his actions. A rancher from the area west of Frontier told the Premier, and I quote:

By your vote today, it has just emphasized how little you really do care about what people really think. It's just another knife in the back.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier realize now that his vote on Friday was a mistake? Will he reconsider and allow the Human Services Committee to hold public hearings in those affected communities?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the member from Melfort, the critic from the Sask Party, was asked directly, "Is the Sask Party categorically opposed to any closures or conversions?" And the member responded:

No, we haven't said that; we said that we would look at all . . . these issues on their merits, that we would look at the statistics. If there are incidents and cases where (we can clearly) . . . (that) can be clearly (be) identified that the facility is not being utilized, that there are no waiting lists, indeed that there are significant vacancies of use, then we think that those decisions might be the right decisions and the community should be involved in understanding that it is the right decision.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to work with communities. There are ideas that will come up that we'll work with the regional health authorities. And we think, Mr. Speaker, that the appropriate place for all of these issues is to be dealt with in the regional health authorities, as we work and look at services for the whole province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Speaker, you can't really blame the people of Climax for not trusting this NDP government. They've got more than a decade of mistrust built up in the reservoir.

But on Friday the minister told them that the health authority was still looking at the options so that health services could be improved, but by the time the delegation got home on Friday afternoon they learned that two lab positions had already had their hours cut. Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of the

NDP saying one thing but actually doing another.

Mr. Speaker, if the government is still looking for ways to maintain or improve services at the Climax Border Health Centre, why are they sending notices out telling health care workers that their hours have been cut?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities work around making the plans around how these services are organized. If services are not being used, they will be changed or they will be dealt with in other ways. That's what's happening right across the province; that's what happens and has happened for many, many years.

Mr. Speaker, the physician who provides services in that area requires lab services at certain times. I think the lab hours are going to be based on the times that he requires those services and I think that's entirely appropriate.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to the minister and for the members opposite that if there were reductions in usage at that health centre, it was because there was a deliberate and conscientious effort not to abuse the system.

They've been asked to look for every efficiency possible. They had done that and naturally the numbers are going to fall. But now those numbers are being used against the people as a justification for reducing service further at that facility. You do what you're asked and you're penalized for doing so.

Mr. Speaker, there will be a public meeting tonight in the community of Climax. They're expecting hundreds of people to come to that town, all concerned about the health services that are being cut in that remote part of the province.

And I'm sure that they would love to hear from their Minister of Health to explain his actions and those of his regional health board. If the minister would like to go to that meeting, Mr. Speaker, I'll make this offer. We can travel together so as not to compromise the government's majority in the House.

Will the minister agree to attend the meeting tonight in the town of Climax?

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I've met with the delegation from Climax now on two occasions. I've told them that I will be going down to that community sometime over the next couple of months to meet with those people. I have spent some time in that community before; I understand some of their concerns around the geography.

But, Mr. Speaker, this community is part of a big issue that's facing the whole of the country. We end up having to look at how we spend our resources. In our health budget this year

we've increased it by \$173 million to \$2.7 billion. It's a very large amount of the money that we're spending. On a national basis this is one of the issues that's there on a national basis.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to be working on a national level, on a provincial level, and on the local and community level to make sure that all of our health resources are spent in the most effective way possible so we can have good health care for all of our citizens.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Why is the member from Athabasca on his feet?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — I ask for leave, Mr. Speaker, leave to introduce guests.

**The Speaker:** — The member for Athabasca is requesting leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — The member may proceed.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour and great pleasure to welcome two former constituents of mine in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker. Of course I'm speaking of Kirstin and Erika Borgerson who were born and raised part of their life in my hometown of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

And I can remember being the mayor, Mr. Speaker, we had what we called a community beautification project. We spent quite a bit of money and time cleaning up the entire community and repairing old docks and fixing up playgrounds and painting buildings. And as part of the community beautification project Kirstin and Erika come along and helped that project a great deal.

And I want to thank their mother for their good looks and to also say it's been a long time since I've seen these two very impressive ladies. And I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me to welcome some very nice young, aggressive, ambitious girls, and to say that I'm very happy to see them once again.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Government Whip.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions no. 496 to 500 inclusive.

**The Speaker:** — Responses to questions 496 through to question no. 500 have been submitted.

#### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

#### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### SECOND READINGS

#### Bill No. 68

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Taylor that **Bill No. 68 — The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2004** be now read a second time.

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

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 68, An Act to amend The Assessment Management Agency Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts is quite a significant piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker, it's quite a significant piece of legislation. There are many pages to it — 18, 20 pages to this Act — and it deals with a lot of issues, a lot of issues that will take some time to review and take some time to go through.

I think the significant part . . . one of the significant parts of this Act is, we've heard some concern with the government that it's not going to be pushed through right away and pushed on right away. Well it's interesting that it would be in Bill No. 68 in a legislative session of about 80 Bills. I would think that if it was so significant and was so time-sensitive that it would have been Bill No. 10, 12, 15 or 20, not Bill No. 68. It certainly has taken a while to get into the House, and now that it's here it's only due process that we take our time to make sure that we understand it as well as we do, as well as many other people that are impacted by this Bill will also understand it.

(14:30)

And I think, Mr. Speaker, any time you start dealing with assessment agencies and dealing with property tax . . . there certainly has been a lot of discussion around property tax in this House over the last couple of months and rightfully so. The education portion of property tax has been a major issue and still continues to be a major issue. We've seen SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) delegates here a number of times with their concerns over it.

The member opposite says they've only been here twice. Well I know that SARM has been here many more times than twice. They had a public rally twice. They came in mass twice, but they have been here talking to government and opposition many, many more times on the absolute necessity to deal with the education of property tax because it is just . . . it's an unfair tax. It's devastating rural Saskatchewan, quite frankly, where commodity prices are dropping. And the one thing you continue to see going up is the issue of property tax. So it's a significant part of it.

In this Bill it talks about assessment in Saskatchewan over the past decades have not gone well for either property owners or

local governments because what has happened over the last 15 to 20 years is government continues to become more and more reliant on property tax.

Mr. Speaker, I heard one person speak about the issue of property tax and the reliance of property tax in our province, and the issue around assessment and how important assessment is now compared to 20 and 30 years ago. Assessment's always been important in our province. But what happens is when you start tacking so much burden, having to raise so much revenue from property tax that if assessment is out a little bit, if assessment is skewed on a particular piece of property, by the time you get the assessment assessed and figured out, by the time you tack on all the tax on top, the foundation, if it's a little bit off, a little bit skewed, really causes some major problems when that final tax bill comes out.

They were talking about assessment really as a foundation of a building and if the assessment isn't done right, the foundation isn't done right, it can't support the load on top of it. And that's certainly what I've heard is that even though now, assessment . . . we're working harder to have a more accurate assessment system. The problem has become not necessarily the assessment system as much as the amount of tax heaped on top of that. And the taxes got greater and greater and greater — or if you use the analogy of a building, getting higher and higher and higher on a small foundation.

And that's where the problem, it's sometimes . . . Maybe there are some issues around assessment and the inaccuracy of it, but the bigger issue is the reliance on property tax which is generated from assessment. That's where the problem is, the reliance on property tax, which certainly goes back to what we discussed last week and the week before and the week before. And the Premier acknowledges it.

And as I said one other speech, that I'm sure every member on that side of the House that did any door knocking in the last campaign would realize that property tax was an issue. It was an issue we heard over and over again. We hear it in rural Saskatchewan. We hear it in our urban centres that we represent. And I know the members opposite would have heard it in their urban centres and the odd rural MLA that they have there, that property tax is a huge issue. We talked about it in our election campaign. The Liberals talked about it in their election campaign, and most definitely, the NDP talked about it in their election campaign.

And if we go back over the last six months to a year and we listen to what the NDP had to say about property tax in the last campaign, you'd find that they would say there was words such as the status quo. This was quoted by the Premier at SARM many times. The status quo is not on. I repeat, the status quo is not on. And it was said a number of times — the status quo is not on.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the status quo is on. They haven't addressed the issue of the burden of property tax, the education of property tax. In this year's budget, they're diverting to talk about amalgamation, and that's the most important issue because they cannot deal with the issue of property tax.

If they came out and said — you know what? — our cupboard

is absolutely bare, we've blown it on different investments here and there and wherever, we don't have enough money to deal with it, we can't deal with it, that would be one thing. But what they've come out and they've said is that, oh yes, we're going to deal with it but just give us a little more time. We're going to force amalgamation of school divisions. We're going to do that to address the equity issue, to address better education.

But it doesn't address the issue that we all heard on the doorsteps. It doesn't address the issue that was talked on, over and over again, on the doorstep . . . is the burden of property tax.

Now the government says . . . and I can hear the Minister of Education chirp from his seat: we're with you, we're with you. Yes, we better amalgamate. We better force amalgamation. We better do all of that. But what he doesn't say and that he won't be with me on, is when I say they haven't kept their election promise, not one bit, Mr. Speaker.

They promised to address the property tax issue. The status quo was not on, and the status quo is on. The Premier stood up during the election campaign and said that we are able to receive the Boughen report within our fiscal situation. But now, Mr. Speaker, if they were honest, if they were able to express the fact that they do not have the money to receive the Boughen report, that would be one thing. But they're not saying that.

Now the Minister of Finance is sitting there with a kind of a funny look on his face, but he knows they don't have the money to address the issues of education portion of property tax. And, Mr. Speaker, if he does . . . and he's kind of shaking his head. I wish he would stand. Oh, he is standing. I . . .

**The Speaker:** — Why is the Government House Leader on his feet?

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening with great interest to the member to see if in any way he might be able to relate this to the legislation that we are purportedly discussing, and I don't see any attempt or any ability on his part, to in fact tie it to the legislation. So I think there's a question here of relevance of his remarks, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — I thank the member for his intervention. Would the member like to make a comment on the point of order?

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I feel the member was talking about assessment of land which does have to do with the Bill and how property taxes are affected, and so therefore I feel that he was relating to the Bill.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order, members. Once again, on an item of this nature, members should be cautioned not to stray too far from the principle of the Bill. I find that it's difficult to speak about assessment without speaking about taxation. I accept that, but let's not go too far on this.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is really interesting that the Minister of Finance could not find the relevancy between the issue of property tax and assessment, which this Bill deals with, Mr. Speaker.

This Bill deals with assessment and changing the way that SARM . . . In order to change their assessor, SARM now needs the agreement of the board of educations. It deals with assessment, and it deals with the very issue that this House has been dealing with for the last two months, Mr. Speaker. And it's an absolute shame that the Minister of Finance cannot find the relevancy between that, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, because it deals directly, directly with the issue of education portion of property tax, which of course we know that the minister does not want to hear about, does not want to hear anything about because they've been failing miserably to address it over the last three and four months, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are many, many quotes regarding the property tax and the issue of assessing property tax and the issue of assessment that this Bill deals with. And every time we start dealing with assessment, it just automatically takes us back to the issue that the government has failed on so miserably. So when he brings up a point of order, it'll be a point of order because it hurts . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. I would ask that the member stick with the text of the Bill and allow the Speaker to deal with points of order. Member for Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — I think, Mr. Speaker, some of the other issues in this Bill that really give concern, not only to many people in this province but to SARM for sure and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) I think to a certain extent, is that it proposes changes to increase the number of individuals sitting on the SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) board from nine to eleven.

Now increasing the number of people sitting on the SAMA board isn't necessarily the issue. What becomes the issue is that they're appointed by government. They're increasing the number of people sitting on the SAMA board to a greater amount — by two, increasing it by two — but those appointments are by government. In other words, they'll hand-pick the people they want to sit on the SAMA board and direct it and kind of push it in the direction that government feels, as opposed to what may be best for the assessment of the province as a whole, Mr. Speaker.

So of course there are concerns, and I know we've heard often from delegates at SARM. And I mean certainly after this past week, this past week, that there are concerns with SARM on many issues that this government is dealing with and this is just one more of them, Mr. Speaker. They realize that the government is trying to get more control over the issue of the assessment by placing two more people on the SAMA board.

It also deals with . . . There's again more uncertainty regarding allowing private assessors by local governments since proposed changes will make it mandatory for affected boards of education to give their approval before changing can actually proceed. In other words, the RMs (rural municipality) and local municipal governments are going to have to deal with the

boards of education, which isn't a problem. But before, if they wanted to change their assessor from a government assessor to a private assessor, that didn't have to be given the approval of a local school board, which now that does. So there are some concerns.

And as a matter of fact, I would like to talk to some of the school boards and see what their concerns are as well because certainly they would have some concerns on that as well.

Overall significant changes will correspond . . . with corresponding impact on a number of stakeholders — school boards, local governments, and property owners. Further consultation is definitely needed on this Bill.

I think, as I said on the outset of my remarks, is that if the Bill was as time-sensitive as what we hear the government feels it is, I wish it had been Bill No. 5 or 10 or 15, and so we could have dealt with all the concerns with other groups. Right now I find that there are many, many organizations — whether it's SARM, whether it's local community groups trying to save their long-term care beds or hospitals, whether it's school boards — all of these groups are feeling that there has been no consultation from this government whatsoever.

We tried to pass a private members' Bill on Friday saying government needs to get out and consult with the local communities before hospital closures or long-term care beds would be closed. They refused that.

I've been talking to a number of school boards throughout the province now that the government is forcing amalgamation on them, saying this is the way it's going to be. And if you talk to those school boards, every one of them would say, we want to have some input in that process as opposed to the minister having a map drawn up in his office by three people that he's appointed, because quite frankly, school boards, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, prior to their announcement, prior to the minister's announcement on the Boughen Commission, said we want to have input.

Now the minister opposite is saying, don't listen to the School Boards Association. And that's exactly what has been their response is they don't want to listen to the School Boards Association. They don't want to listen to the local board that has gone through two or three amalgamations. And, Mr. Speaker, they don't want to consult with anybody right now. They don't want to consult with SARM because this piece of legislation impacts them directly, Mr. Speaker.

So at this juncture, Mr. Speaker, I'd move to adjourn debate.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the member for Indian Head-Milestone that debate on second reading of Bill No. 68 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.



(14:45)

**Bill No. 59**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 59 — The Ambulance Amendment Act, 2004** be now read a second time.

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

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and talk to Bill No. 59, The Ambulance Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the notes when the minister brought the Bill in, the second reading Bill, and one of his statements in the Bill was these changes were brought in to show ambulance service providers that they will be and continue to be an integral part of our health care system. And, Mr. Speaker, we know, we know that there is some concerns that are out in the area about that.

And, Mr. Speaker, the minister also stated that this Bill repeals redundant and obsolete sections of The Ambulance Act and aligns new reporting requirements. Well, Mr. Speaker, that in itself is a bit of a worry because it's hard to tell what the underlying motives are to this Bill. At first blush it would appear that the housekeeping changes . . . that it is predominantly housekeeping changes to reflect the regional health authorities. But it's what we didn't hear from the minister that has an awful lot of people concerned.

Mr. Speaker, it's very obvious that ambulance service is a very key component to our health care services, and specifically in rural Saskatchewan. We've got private operators in some very remote parts of the province that have experienced over the last few years increasing pressures from this government as to how they operate and putting rules in place that almost make it impossible to operate.

Mr. Speaker, I can relate in one of the communities that contacted me, they have an ambulance bought by the community, it is operated by the community, it is of no cost that I know of to the Health department. And yet the government, this NDP government, comes in with rules and says, I'm sorry, you can't operate your ambulance. And, Mr. Speaker, this just doesn't make sense.

And I had an experience like that of my own and I would relate it, and then I would ask the people of this province what is in their best interest . . . have an ambulance which is a box-type ambulance, with two qualified individuals, qualified to the capabilities of part-time ambulance operators and EMS people. And I experienced a situation such as that where the rules come down, and the rules say that, I'm sorry, we have set this set of rules that you cannot operate your ambulance; you cannot operate your ambulance unless you comply totally and 100 per cent with the rules that I, being the NDP government, have directed.

So you know how you get around that, Mr. Speaker? And this is the sad part, this is the very, very sad part. I can get a van, and I

can put a mattress in the back of a van, and I can get somebody that's had some first aid service, and we can go out and legally bring a person into town — in the back of a van, with a mattress on the floor, with somebody that's had some first aid knowledge.

Now can anybody tell me what would provide the best service to an individual that's injured out in a rural area, whether it's out on a ranch working cattle . . . would it be a box ambulance with qualified people that don't meet the NDP's new rules, or legally do it in the back of a van on a mattress with somebody like myself that's first aid qualified?

Now I think everybody has to sit back and think about what would be the best service for the people of this province, and that's something, Mr. Speaker, that really needs to be looked at when we start looking at changes to this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, there's an awful lot that this Bill does not talk about. It doesn't really talk about, will amendments disrupt services and put Saskatchewan people at risk. And that's what I was referring to, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of thing where we put rules down, when we operate from the centre, and don't take into consideration what's really happening out at the extremities of our province.

Mr. Speaker, another question that needs to be answered: will some private operators simply pack up and leave, as so many other businesses have, when they become tired of this government's increasing demands? And that is a fear, that is a fear not only from the private ambulance operators, Mr. Speaker, that is a fear from the people. That is a fear from the people of the rural areas that they are going to lose ambulance services.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to put into the record some letters, some correspondence, that not only I have received, but I know the minister has received and the Premier has received. But did this change them toward the Bill? I think not. And I think this is why it needs to be put on record, so the people of this province understand the concerns of not only the private ambulance operators, but also the concerns of the people that are out in the rural parts of the province.

Mr. Speaker . . . and I'm going to do a fair bit of reading from some of these letters because they say it as it is felt by them. Here is a letter from an ambulance operator in my constituency. And, Mr. Speaker, the letter says, and it's actually referring to sections 10 and 18 of The Ambulance Act, and it says,

As a private ambulance operator, I wish to express my strong opposition to these proposed changes. It is my understanding that if the aforementioned sections (which is 10 and 18) are deleted, the Regional Health Authority would have the ability to cancel a contract with a given E.M.S. provider without just cause and that the E.M.S. provider would become an affiliate of the R.H.A. Further, it would appear that the reasons behind the proposed changes would be to limit the control that a private operator has over the business that they (now) own and operate.

And I want to pause there for a minute, Mr. Speaker, before I

continue with this letter. Because here is another example of an NDP socialist government that wants to tinker with a private operation. This particular ambulance operation is running great. It's running efficient. It's effective. And now the government wants to get involved with it. Go figure.

Mr. Speaker, the author goes on, the author goes on to say:

I fully realize and agree that there must be strict guidelines in health care, (which they abide by) and any private E.M.S. operator must provide a service to the community they (will) serve with the utmost of care and competency.

Mr. Speaker, this ambulance service does exactly that.

Since 1981, our service has accomplished this and has been a progressive organization offering trustworthy, caring and courteous transport of clients in need. The business is a family operation which is dear to us and is operated in a manner which is fiscally responsible.

Here we go again. Fiscally responsible ambulance business and the government wants to get involved with it and somehow or other tinker with it and take over it.

It is, of course, of great concern that the Regional Health Authority may potentially have the power to designate or withhold funds and dictate staffing and equipment needs, as it has done with health centres and hospitals in our area. Also, if the proposed changes are realized, the privately owned E.M.S. services under the R.H.A.'s jurisdiction would be forced to operate without a contract, and without any reassurance or confidence that the business they own along with the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment will be needed tomorrow.

It goes without saying that after 23 years of operation, I am very aware of what my staffing and equipment needs are. I care deeply about my business and (my) employees . . . (I) have seen time and again, the quality of service decline when a business is operated by administrators who are far removed from the operation itself, and have no personal interest in its well being.

It is with these things in mind that I ask for clarification of the proposed changes to The Ambulance Act.

Mr. Speaker, this letter is one that's signed by a private ambulance operator in my constituency and I know, and I know she has a pile of concerns — a pile of concerns. And, Mr. Speaker, this goes on throughout, throughout my constituency. And I really would like again to put into the record so some of the members opposite realize what effect this is having in the rural areas. Whether they care or not, they should be aware of what the changes are going to do to affect the people out in the areas. And I relate back to what I said earlier about, what are the alternatives? If the ambulance services are going to be pilfered away, what is going to happen?

And, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to relate stories to have somebody that's an urbanite to know what goes on in rural Saskatchewan, but I do have another one that relates to what you have if you don't have an ambulance available.

I mean, we talk about health care. And we talk every day about health care, and how health care has been affected in this province and getting worse in the rural areas as we just witnessed by this last go-round of cuts.

There's a fellow that I know very . . . knew very well in my constituency that had a heart attack. There's no time for an ambulance where we live. That relates back to accessibility of health care, universality and accessibility, and how does one get to a facility.

And so what happened in this particular case, he was put in the back seat of a car. It wasn't even the luxury of the van with a mattress in the back seat. And they got to about 5 miles from the hospital and he said to the driver, I'm not going to make it. And he didn't.

Now we talk about no ambulance care there, and it's going to get worse if this Bill goes through. And we talk about accessibility to health care.

Well there's somebody . . . Who knows if he would've made it if he would've had accessibility to health care a little bit closer? Would've he? We don't know that. But we do know that he didn't have the accessibility that is that some people quote within an hour, and we also do know that he didn't make it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read parts of another letter from the municipality of Stonehenge, and this is from the administrator of the municipality. And I'll just read parts of the letter, but it talks about the:

. . . privately owned ambulance service has provided exemplary service to our area residents for over 20 years. They provide this service cost efficiently and the staff is well qualified. Requiring them to become affiliated and giving the control to the regional health authority will only cause inefficiencies in the overall operations. We can foresee increased staffing at the administration level in the regional health authority, a decline in the standard of service which we have become accustomed to, and the end result is additional cost to the health care system. We believe this money could be better used elsewhere.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that particular author says it's going to cost the health care system more money.

Well when we talk about the ambulance service in the total health care system and as we've heard from the Premier on various other topics, as the previous speaker talked about, the status quo is not on. And how many times have we heard the Premier say, the status quo is not on? But in fact if the status quo is not on to help people, the Premier turns it aside — such as the taxes, such as SAMA. The status quo is not on.

But now we come to ambulance service and, although the Premier hasn't directly said the status quo is not on, what he's doing is acting like the status quo is not on. In other words, the status quo was pretty good in the ambulance service out there, but he is going to stand up and say the status quo is not on, so we're going to make it worse.

And that's the same as our rural hospitals. He may stand and

say the status quo is not on, so we're going to close rural hospitals. And this is what's kind of maddening. The ambulance services can and will be cut which the status quo, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, the status quo for the ambulance service is not on according to the NDP government because it's working well now and we want to change it and tinker with it. So therefore the status quo is not on.

Mr. Speaker, I have a whole pile of letters here that I know the minister has received. I don't know if he's responded to them. But I know, Mr. Speaker, also there is an awful lot of speakers that would really like to speak to this Bill, so at this time I would like to adjourn debate.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the member for Wood River that debate on Bill No. 59 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — The motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

**Clerk Assistant:** — Committee of Finance.

**The Speaker:** — I do now leave the Chair for the Assembly to go into Committee of Finance.

(15:00)

## COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

### General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

#### Subvote (EX01)

**The Chair:** — Committee of Finance. The first item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for Department of Executive Council, vote no. 10 found on page 59 of the Estimates book. And I would recognize the Premier to introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Joining me today are three officials from Executive Council. At my left, Mr. Dan Perrins, who is the deputy minister; to my left and just behind, Barbara MacLean, who is the director of senior management services; and directly behind me, Ms. Bonita Cairns, who is the director of administration and information services.

**The Chair:** — Administration (EX01). I recognize the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to certainly welcome the Premier and the Premier's officials for the estimates of Executive Council and the question-and-answer session that we're going to have — and no doubt in exchange of . . . hopefully an exchange of ideas and a debate.

By way of housekeeping, I would point out last year I believe

the Committee of Finance began reviewing vote 10 Executive Council on 25 June. And the very first question from my predecessor, the current member for Rosetown, was specifically . . . and I'm just going to quote it here, so that we can have it on the record again.

The Premier asked for . . . well, the Premier asked for some . . . the leader of the opposition of the day asked for some basic information from the Premier in terms of who works for Executive Council, the officials that work for Executive Council, and as the former leader characterized it, some requests for some housekeeping information. The Premier indicated that day that that information was not available immediately but undertook to get that to the member.

And our records . . . And I've consulted with the former leader of the opposition, our records are such that that information never did come. And I wonder if the Premier will clarify now that that information will be provided to members of the committee for '03-'04 before we're concluded deliberating here. And the page of *Hansard*, so they can get the details of what was asked for, was 1931, June 25, 2003.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, it was our understanding that the information was sent. We'll double-check it. If it's not, we will certainly provide it.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you Mr. Premier, Mr. Chair. And I would make the same request for '04.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to talk for . . . spend some time deliberating on the equalization question and ask the Premier some specific questions about that. The Premier will know that my first full day in this new job, I sent a letter to the Premier indicating that the opposition supported the government's position that the equalization formula as it's currently constituted represents an unfairness, if you will, for our province in the clawback that happens with respect to our resource revenue certainly isn't acceptable. And we indicated to the Premier we would support him in that.

In fact, when the Minister of Finance needed to go to Ottawa to make that case to a Senate committee, my colleague, the deputy leader for the opposition and the member for Canora-Pelly, accompanied him. And certainly that remains the position of the Saskatchewan Party and the opposition today.

Having said that I have some specific questions. Specifically, prior to the media reports that we heard earlier this year and prior to the report being released by Professor Courchene, I would like to know from the Premier when he first spoke out about this issue or members of his government.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, this has been a consistent theme of our government for some many, many years. Very specifically I'd have to check calendars and dates. But I well recall, during my term as Premier, meeting with then the federal Finance minister, John Manley, accompanied by then Finance minister, now the current Minister of Industry and Resources, as we made a very significant presentation to that minister of Finance federal about equalization, about the unfairness of its application to Saskatchewan, particularly on that case on the mining tax credit.

What we are very grateful for, Mr. Chair, in this province, is the work of Professor Tom Courchene, who will be recognized across Canada as one of almost a handful of Canadians, who can claim significant expertise on the equalization formula, on its history, and on its application.

Professor Courchene's work — done independently if I may say, Mr. Chair, he did rely on some statistical information provided by our Department of Finance, but his study was self-initiated and done independently, and presents a very third party, independent review of equalization as how it affects Saskatchewan. It is that work that has given to our province a very, very solid platform on which to make a very strong case. The same case that we've made for years, but with Professor Courchene's work, we have a third party independent platform that gives so much more strength to our case.

And we, if I may say, Mr. Chair, have pursued this in years past; are pursuing it, as you know, with vigour now, and will continue to pursue this until we reach, what we believe, is an equitable and fair equalization formula for the people of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier, Mr. Chair. I don't remember the Government of Saskatchewan, I don't remember the current Premier talking about this issue prior to earlier this year, prior to Professor Courchene's analysis of the current flaws. But perhaps the Premier can comment or answer as to when exactly the latest, the last, the latest five-year agreement with the federal government was signed continuing the equalization formula in its current form, and were the flaws in the formula discussed at that time?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I will be very pleased to provide to the Leader of the Opposition the exact dates and times of the last signing of equalization. We know it's now coming up for renewal again. And in that round of negotiations, yes, Saskatchewan was raising some of the very same issues.

And if the Leader of the Opposition does not remember, I'm sure we could share with him the press surrounding the debate that I and the former minister of Finance had with John Manley. There was some pretty wide public coverage of that debate and we can easily provide dates and specific times if that's of some value to the Leader of the Opposition.

I think what's of more value, is us speaking with one voice on the matter of equalization to effect some change. We have an ideal opportunity, Mr. Chair. We are now in the midst of a federal election and this is the ideal opportunity for us, with one voice — not with demur, but with one voice — to fight for a fair equalization formula for Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier, Mr. Chair. The truth of the matter is, the questions that I've just asked we've asked before in this session. We asked a written question some time ago asking for the dates of occasions when government or Finance official have raised specific issues with the federal government with respect to equalization. The question was not answered. And I guess the point today is, I think we'd like to know that.

It doesn't change the fact at all that we can support the Premier,

that I can support the Premier, that members of this side of the House can support members of that side of the House, as we have done in travel and in going to different hearings on the issue. But the government can still be held to an account for how forcefully and how consistently it has made this case.

We just came through a provincial election not long ago when issues of import to the province are obviously discussed, commitments are made by either party. And since the election this has been the refrain that we have heard over and over and over again from the government when it comes to being unable to fulfill its promises that it made in the campaign or when it's highlighting the challenges that it faces. This is all we hear about. Certainly we hear about it now more than we ever have in the past, notwithstanding an isolated incident with the former minister Manley of the Liberal government.

So the question again: we asked a written question in the Assembly for this information — doesn't change our support for the Premier's position but it goes to accountability — and we'd like the Premier to answer those questions at this time.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, we're very happy . . . We will provide, if he wants, the dates of the meetings between officials. We can provide the dates of meetings between officials. I can provide him the date at the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon where the former minister of Finance and I sat down.

Mr. Chair, since the standard was changed in 1982 from the ten-province standard to the five-province standard it has been a consistent theme of governments of Saskatchewan to protest the effect on this province of moving from the ten-province standard to the five-province standard.

Now the Leader of the Opposition wants to know what we've been doing. We'll give him a solid record of working with the Finance officials. We've taken the point of view that some of the best work can be done through officials and it's been done. When we went very public with the former minister of Finance it was in the news broadcasts, it was in the newspapers. I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition didn't see them.

We have had a consistent theme as government. I can ask the question of the Leader of the Opposition: when did we hear from the Saskatchewan Party any concern about equalization? When have we heard that concern? In fact what concerns me now is that I hear the Leader of the Opposition going off to chamber of commerce banquets and so on trying to downplay this issue.

Mr. Chair, this is no time for division. What we need is a consistent voice from Saskatchewan with support, if I may say, from the opposition for once on this file.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well thank you, Mr. Premier, Mr. Chairman. Here's what we tell the chambers of commerce, and here's what we tell people that we have a chance to speak to, and people that I have a chance to speak to. We say first and foremost that we support the Premier and his government in their efforts to get the funding formula changed, we say that. We indicate to those people that we sent a letter to the Premier, that I sent a letter to the Premier on the first day on this new job and indicated that very same thing.

But we are quick to add, I'm quick to add at those opportunities, as I was in the letter, that the equalization formula as it exists today, as unfair as it is, ought not to be an excuse by this government for continuing to rack up increasing debt for the province or deficits.

The equalization formula has been this way for some number of years. The Premier's predecessor, Mr. Romanow, the current Finance minister's predecessor twice removed I guess, were able to balance the budget of the province of Saskatchewan without having to . . . without a change in the equalization formula. And so we said quite fairly, don't use it as an excuse.

We also said — we also said — and we've said to the chambers of commerce that the government of the day ought not to spend taxpayers' dollars on a print ad, a print ad if you can believe it, Mr. Chairman, highlighting the need for the federal government to change its position.

Here it is, Mr. Chairman of committees. It says, tell us again. And the cost . . . This by the way was printed in *The StarPhoenix* and the *Leader-Post*. Tell us again, it says, and it outlines the case for a change in the equalization formula. Cost to the taxpayers — \$75,000.

And the Premier's right. The Premier referenced the fact that we would advocate picking up the phone and calling officials, or maybe driving . . . Here's a radical idea. How about drive around Wascana Lake and meet with the Finance minister and make the case.

We said we wouldn't support wasting taxpayers' dollars on this ad because this ad is not about changing the equalization formula. This ad — this ad — is about excuses by this Premier and this government who are continually breaking election promises, and they need to find excuses. They need to find excuses.

So they print this ad out, not for Mr. Goodale or for Mr. Martin to see because let's face it, the market for this advertising campaign is a market of two people. How many businesses in the province of Saskatchewan would spend \$75,000 on a print advertising campaign to reach two customers? Apparently this government. So that is the point.

And one final point I'll make to the Premier on this issue so he's completely clear on what we've been saying to chambers of commerce, to frankly fairly well-attended meetings of chambers of commerce and fairly well-attended leader's dinners — here's what we, here's the other thing that we've been saying. Yes, Mr. Premier, we've been saying, go down to Ottawa and lobby for a funding formula change and we'll send the Finance critic with the Finance minister. We'll do what we're asked to do by this government to try to make a case.

(15:15)

But, but say something more than just, give us more assistance. That's what we've said to the Premier. Don't just go down to Ottawa and ask for more assistance for us as a have-not province, but articulate a vision for this province so that one day we will be a have province and that we can give more to the country than we ever need to ask in return, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — And I guess that's the difference. You know, and in all fairness, the Premier has used the equalization issue as an excuse. I mean his ministers talk about it all the time. When the Minister of the Environment was asked about, in a scrum, he was asked, well what do you think the people will be thinking about when they sit around their campfires about all the fee increases and the new wiener roast tax, you know what he said, Mr. Chairman? He said, well I think they'll be thinking about how unfair the equalization formula is.

They do use it as an excuse. But, Mr. Chairman, to the Premier, to the Premier: why didn't he then say, why didn't he say in the campaign, here's what I promise, here are my commitments to you on property tax, on health care, on, on, on say the PST (provincial sales tax) — here are my promises, but I may not be able to keep them, depending on the equalization formula? Why didn't he then say that five, six months ago during the campaign?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition came to his new responsibilities promising a new and a different opposition. That is obviously not the case even in these early moments of discussion in Committee of Finance. Because what this Leader of Opposition wants to do is to take an issue which is of extreme significance to the people of Saskatchewan, and if I may say, to our economic future and our part in this great nation, he wants to take this very significant issue and just in a moment turn it into just a partisan political discussion — the same thing we've heard all session ad nauseam.

Now the Leader of the Opposition in this little attack begins by saying that this government should not have invested in public education, public information through newspaper ads. Well the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, had this government not raised this significant matter of equalization and raised it with the people of Saskatchewan through a mechanism by which the people can understand the issue — not through a mechanism which asks for some phone-in response or some clip-out coupon but through information to the people of Saskatchewan — if this government had not led that attack, do you think, Mr. Chair, or do the citizens of this province think that we would have achieved what we have already achieved, which is a \$120 million down payment on monies owing to the people of Saskatchewan? Do you think, Mr. Chair, that equalization would even be a mention in this federal election campaign? Do you think without this effort we would see the discussion that's happening in the federal election campaign? Do you think we would have merited \$120 million if we had stood silent? I think not.

But the Leader of the Opposition wants to criticize that. The Leader of the Opposition asks what contacts have been made. What have we been doing? He said I could drive around Wascana Lake and meet the Minister of Finance. Well I've driven around Wascana Lake. I've met the Minister of Finance. I've met other ministers of the federal government. I've met the Prime Minister of Canada specifically on this issue at 24 Sussex.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition, whom has he met with? Who has he talked to? Has he talked to his federal leader, Stephen Harper? Has he done that? Who has the Leader of the Opposition talked to?

Now in fact, Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition, in this legislature, earlier in the session said — when we were preparing to celebrate the deepening of Wascana Lake — the Leader of the Opposition said that he would be there with me to speak to Mr. Goodale, the Minister of Finance of Ottawa. Was he there to speak with me with the Minister of Finance of Ottawa? No, he was not. He may have been in the crowd, but he didn't bother to come forward and do what he committed to do in the House.

So when we want to talk about meeting with federal people, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to stand up and give us a little report today, if he is so committed, to whom has he written? Whom has he met with in the federal government? Who has he talked to about this issue? Let him answer that. Then, Mr. Chair, then, Mr. Chair, he would say in his remarks today that we have not been giving to the country because of equalization.

Well it's clear, Mr. Chair, that the opposition members have not yet understood the flow of equalization. Provinces do not contribute to equalization. Equalization is a federal program by which the national government shares from its general base of revenues to provinces. Provinces do not contribute to equalization.

But I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, when the Leader of the Opposition suggests that Saskatchewan has not contributed to the nation, I am appalled; I am appalled. This province contributes way above its weight — economically, socially, and politically — to the nation of Canada. I am appalled to hear the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that Saskatchewan does not contribute overall to the nation. We are doing that, Mr. Chair.

I share his argument that our goal, our goal as a province is not to be receiving equalization, and therefore to be described as a have province. A fair equalization program, a equitable equalization formula, will in fact make it possible, easier for this province to move out of equalization. And if the Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand that, he ought to read, he ought to read Professor Courchene's paper.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well I want to explore this a little bit because the Premier's talked about something that he talked about to the Regina Chamber of Commerce not long ago. It was covered in the paper, and I was incredulous when I read it, Mr. Chairman, because . . . and I think, I think this is where he, the Premier, was going at the end of the last answer.

Here is the Premier's plan, and correct me if I'm wrong — I know he will — but it seems to me that here's the Premier's plan for us to become a have province. His plan for us to become a have province is to get the equalization formula changed. That's it. That's it.

Well that's what he said to the Regina Chamber of Commerce. It's not based on growing the economy, it's based on keeping

more of what we have already. It's based on keeping more of our oil and gas revenue. And the Saskatchewan Party agrees with him that we should keep more than what we're allowed to keep under the current formula, under the current structure. We believe that to be true.

But that is a change to the equalization formula in and of itself and should have nothing to do with the government's plan to become a have province. That should be built on a foundation of a growing economy — not keeping more of existing oil and gas revenue, but more oil and gas activity. Not keeping more of any resources in terms of mining, but more activity, Mr. Chairman.

And if that's not the case, if that's not the case, then the Premier — then the Premier should stand and answer. Because this is what I heard when he, this is what I read in the Regina Chamber of Commerce. It's this circular argument. In fact I heard folks on a talk show talking about the same thing. This circular argument of the Premier; we need to change the funding formula because it doesn't treat us, it doesn't treat us as fairly as it treats other have-not provinces.

Oh well, what about a plan to become a have province? Well if we could just change the equalization formula, then we'd become a have province. How about growing the province's economy, Mr. Chairman?

And so that is what we would, and so that's what we would ask the Premier to elaborate on just now, his last comments there and what he told the Regina Chamber of Commerce. What exactly is his plan? What does it involve to become . . . for Saskatchewan to become a have province?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition invites me to talk about an economic future for Saskatchewan, because it is building that economic future that will ensure the future of our communities, of our province, of our young people, of our health care system. Now let me speak then just briefly — just briefly — about this government's work to build a strong, green, and prosperous economy now in spite of, if I may say, in spite of the naysayers across the way.

Let's have a look at some of the most recent evidence. Let's have a look at some of the most recent evidence about what's happening in the Saskatchewan economy.

The Leader of the Opposition, fair enough, argues we need to see new and expanded development in our resource sector, oil and gas. What are the facts, Mr. Chair; what are the facts? Well the facts are today we are seeing record levels of oil and gas exploration and activity in this province — record levels, Mr. Chair. Yes, that is contributing to a growing economy.

We believe that contributing to a growing economy means building on our forestry resource. What have we seen? In just the past few years, \$1 billion of new investment in the forestry; \$1 billion of private sector new investment in the forestry, Mr. Chair.

We believe there is strength in agriculture, Mr. Chair. We believe that. In spite of the years of drought, which has handicapped many of our farm families, in spite of the closed

borders, we believe there is tremendous future in the land, in agriculture. And we have seen the diversification of Saskatchewan agriculture. Just in the last several years we have doubled the number of food processing operations in our province. We've seen all the work and innovation in biotechnologies. We've seen the diversification right on the family farm. And we've seen a significant growth in the livestock industry in this province.

Mr. Chair, we believe in building on the resources of Saskatchewan in mining — in mining, Mr. Chair. And so we've seen now record levels in our mining industry. We're on the verge of opening a significant new development in the uranium industry. We may well be on the verge of making Saskatchewan one of the diamond-producing capitals of the world, Mr. Chair. We are seeing, as a result of changes in royalty structure with the potash industry, expansion, specifically at the Rocanville mine. And we're working with the mining industry. You can read the reviews of the mining industry now saying Saskatchewan is a very competitive place to invest for mining.

We've believed in building our economy through making Saskatchewan more competitive. And now, you can review the work of KPMG which will tell you Saskatchewan communities are the most or among the most competitive communities in which to do business in North America.

Mr. Chair, we are seeing a new flow of immigrants coming into this province. We are seeing . . . I met yesterday, at the Moose Jaw air show, a young couple who have recently immigrated from Alberta to take up ranching just south of Moose Jaw. We're seeing the Alberta ranchers coming into this province because it's a good place to invest and do business.

We're seeing the, we're seeing the work of the innovation and high technologies at our universities with Innovation Place in Saskatoon. We'll soon see the commissioning of the largest scientific project in Canada with the Canadian Light Source synchrotron. We see the work happening here at the Research Park in Regina, in petroleum research, greenhouse gas research. We see the innovation agenda bringing economic activity.

We see, Mr. Chair, this week, we see the tourism industry flourishing in our province, flourishing in our province because we have a province that welcomes people and a province with much to share to the tourist.

I met this morning, as we indicated earlier, with the Consul General of Germany in Vancouver. Do you know, Mr. Chair, in the year 2002, 6,000 German tourists came to Saskatchewan — 6,000 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I guess the member of Wood River doesn't want 6,000 German tourists.

Mr. Chair, we are building the economy. Now can a change in equalization forward that? Well if the Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand how our prospects could be forwarded with fair and equitable equalization, I invite him to call the Premier of Alberta because he could explain it to him. I invite him to call premiers in Atlantic Canada who could explain it to him.

Mr. Chair, when we are losing from our own resource revenues more than \$1 for every dollar we collect, that's one less dollar for us to invest in infrastructure that provides for economy, to

invest in social programming to build good quality communities that provides for economy, to invest in post-secondary education and research that provides for economy, and, Mr. Chair, to invest in competitive regimes by which we can attract economy.

We've seen the explosion of oil and gas exploration in this province, I submit, because we made some significant change to the royalty and the taxation regime in that regard. Those dollars that are ours, that are now being clawed back by Ottawa, in the hands of the people of Saskatchewan can be invested in creating even a more robust economy, a more robust economy that will soon have us beyond the equalization threshold and proudly being a have province in the nation.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Premier's plan for the province that he highlighted, does he have a population growth target and if so, could he share that with members of the committee?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, you'll know that the Saskatchewan Party went all over the province during the election saying they could grow the population of Saskatchewan by 100,000 people in 10 years. And then they introduced a plan which said we're going to do that; you know how we're going to do it? Well we're just going to cut all the taxes and that should do the trick; oh yes, we forgot, yes, and we're going to get out of competition with the private sector — which is a code for privatization; we should have a little discussion about that this afternoon — oh, and one other ingredient, we're going to eliminate the laws that protect working people. That's the plan. They said that would get you 100,000 people.

Mr. Chair, we're not in the game of playing the political games of trying to put on whether it's going to be 100,000 in 10 years or 200 or 50,000. We're in the project of building a strong platform and a strong economy through some of the areas I've talked about — through immigration, through working with our First Nations people, our Aboriginal peoples who will contribute to this economy perhaps more than any others with their young people now coming forward.

(15:30)

Mr. Chair, we've put in place a solid plan to build a Saskatchewan economy, and we want I may say, in contrast to those opposite, we want the benefits of that new economy to flow to all of the people of Saskatchewan, not just to a few but to all of the people of Saskatchewan.

Now the Leader of the Opposition wants to start talking about equalization. I asked him a little earlier, how many meetings has he had with federal officials? Has he written to the federal officials? Has he written to the Prime Minister? Has he written to the three leaders of the federal party or the four major leaders? What, Mr. Chair, tangible activity has the Leader of the Opposition done on behalf of Saskatchewan people to fight for a fair equalization formula? Perhaps he would like to report that to the House this afternoon.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Chairman, does the Premier have a population target? It doesn't have to be a number, a gross number. Does he have a target at all for the province in terms of growth? The national average is about 1 per cent. Does he have a target below that, above that? Does he have any target at all to get our population growing and expand our tax base in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, our target is to build a green and a prosperous economy to provide good quality public services for the people of Saskatchewan, to utilize the tools which are ours including the Crown sector, and to make this an appealing province and prospect for our young people. Those are the targets we set: substantive targets, not political targets, Mr. Chair, but substantive targets.

To help meet those targets, Mr. Chair, equalization is an important component. Again I ask the Leader of the Opposition; he complains about the government. He complains about everything we do in terms of equalization or, for that matter, in any other regard. Then, Mr. Chair, what has he been doing? If he doesn't particularly like what we're doing on the equalization file, what has he been doing? What has he been doing other than signing one letter to me — one of the rare times he ever sends me a letter — one letter and making a couple of speeches?

Mr. Chair, what has the Leader of the Opposition party been doing? What has the Saskatchewan Party been doing? Who has he met with? Who has he lobbied? Let him answer this question: has he even lobbied his own federal leader, Stephen Harper?

**Mr. Wall:** — Well . . .

**The Chair:** — Sorry, order. Members, we are here to discuss the estimates of Exec Council, and I know that that traditionally is fairly boisterous. But I would just advise members to treat all members as honourable. And I'd like to be able to hear the people that have the floor. And there seems to be some private conversations between members on either side, and I would ask them to take it behind the bar. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well first of all I did not realize that the Premier wants to receive more letters from me. If I would've realized that, I would've maybe sent him some more. I fact, Mr. Chairman, I'm kind of composing one right now that I might send over, and it might probably go something like: dear Mr. Premier, have some targets to get our population growing in the province of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — It might go on to say we have been at the same population since 1929. That's long before we knew of the oil and gas riches of this province that the Premier highlights. That's long before anybody found any potash or uranium, now a third of the world's supply. It's long before we knew anything of diamonds or of the immeasurable potential of our forestry industry, and yet since that date our population has remained

stagnant.

Well why is that important? Because I'm not sure the Premier or the NDP of this province seem to understand why that's important. You see, the more people you have, the more people that we have in Saskatchewan, the more taxpayers we're going to have. And the more taxpayers we're going to have, the more resources that we're going to have for governments so that when — God forbid — something like BSE hits, the government has a resource base to go to, to be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with producers. So that we don't have to have the longest waiting list for health care in all of the Dominion of Canada — that's why you want more population. So that we don't have to fund education off of land, Mr. Chairman, so we can fund it off of a population base and students. That's why you want to have it.

And I would sum that letter up with this. I would say: Mr. Premier, I ask you again, please, please highlight for the people of this province what target you have, what plans you have to get our population past the point where it has been since 1929. And if you have, if you have no such plans, maybe state that too. Maybe you don't think population is a big deal; maybe it's not a measure of anything if you're the Premier of this province, the Leader of the NDP. And if that's the case, we need to know that too so we can make a switch.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, let me ask this question. The Saskatchewan Party went about the province before the November election saying they had a plan to, I think they used the word, grow Saskatchewan by 100,000 people. Well is that the plan today? Is that the plan today? Because days after the election, they wiped the plan off the Web page; they just wiped it off. Is it still their plan? And I ask the Leader of the Opposition, is it still his plan? Well it must be.

He was saying this to chambers of commerce, that his plan for the economy is threefold. You cut the taxes unsustainably, you cut the taxes unsustainably. You privatize the Crowns, and you renovate the labour legislation in Saskatchewan. That's the plan outlined by the Saskatchewan Party.

Now the fact of the matter is we have put in place a significant plan to see the Saskatchewan economy build. And I can tell you, Mr. Chair, you can listen to the voices over there. You can listen; the people of Saskatchewan can listen to that negativity over there. But I tend to listen to people like Standard & Poor, Standard & Poor of New York City, one of the most significant bond rating agencies in the world. One of the most significant bond rating agencies in the world has looked at the budgetary work of this government, has looked at the economy of Saskatchewan today, has looked at the potential of our economy under the leadership of this government, and what did they conclude, Mr. Chair? They conclude this province merits a credit rating upgrade.

Now that's the assessment of Standard & Poor about the budgetary measures of this government, the economic planning of the people of Saskatchewan, and the great potential of Saskatchewan. Our targets, Mr. Chair, our targets are to . . .



**The Chair:** — Order. Members, I know that there are many members who want to participate in that, but if there are some private conversations that are being yelled back and forth on both side of the House, I would ask those members to take the conversation behind the bar. I recognize the Premier, if he wants to finish his answer.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — So, Mr. Chair, this institution of world reputation looks at Saskatchewan, looks at the fiscal management of this government, looks at the prospects and says this province merits a credit rating upgrade.

Now why doesn't the Leader of the Opposition follow his own words for once and give credit where credit is due? This credit is due to the people of Saskatchewan. This credit is due to good fiscal management here, and this credit is due to an economic game plan that's working.

Now I'll tell you about an economic game plan that's working, Mr. Chair. I'll tell you about an economic game plan that's working. When the Leader of the Opposition was going to the school of government here in this building in the 1980s, we were losing people in this province at a rate unheard of — unheard of — in this province's history. That's what was happening. While he was at school in government here, they were bankrupting the province. It has taken us, Mr. Chair, from 1986 until last week — from 1986 until last week — to so manage the fiscal affairs of this province and to so build its economy. It's taken us that long to get AA credit ratings across the board in the United States of America. That's what we've had to fight against. Never mind these past few years of drought and BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) and unfair international subsidies; never mind that.

We've built an economy that has diversified, that has earned for the people of Saskatchewan from Standard & Poor's of New York City, a credit rating upgrade. And where's the real proof, where is the real proof about the success of the economic planning and the work that's going on in this province? Well it came in April and it came in May, when more Saskatchewan people are going to work in the months of April and May this year than in any other April or May in the history of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, the Premier's right. We've committed to give credit where credit is due. And I'm going to get back to population growth in a moment. With respect to Standard & Poor and with respect to a credit rating, we will give credit where credit is due. The credit of course is due Mr. Romanow and Ms. MacKinnon who happened to inherit the fiscal situation that they inherited from the government of the 1980s.

Since then, Mr. Chairman of committees, since then this Premier has been busy reversing the work that they've done. This Premier has been piling on more debt to the province's taxpayers — over a billion and a half more debt, thanks to that Premier, Mr. Speaker, and a current cadre of Finance ministers. The truth of the matter is that this particular Premier is sort of a back-to-the-1970s, tax-and-spend social democrat. He's racked up deficit after deficit. He's increased the debt. And now he's

got the temerity to stand in his place in the House and claim credit for the work of his predecessor, Mr. Chairman. That's what he's doing.

Here's the question, here's the question to the Premier. During the election campaign, I heard local NDP candidates in southwest Saskatchewan say things like, in terms of the population, say things like 800, 900,000 people — that's just about the right size for Saskatchewan. They were mocking our goal to get our province's population growing.

By the way, the goal was based on the national average. It's one per cent growth a year. And I think that that is a laudable goal and one that we should be setting in Saskatchewan, to meet the national average in population growth.

But I remember hearing local NDP candidates saying that we didn't need to get the population growing, that 8 or 900 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well we heard it. In fact we heard the member for Regina Wascana say the same thing. And we heard the member for Saskatchewan Rivers say we don't need to get our province growing. He was mocking that.

I would like to get the Premier on the record: does he believe, does he believe we need to substantively expand our population and grow our population? Does he believe that, yes or no? Does he think Saskatchewan's population must grow if we are to sustain the quality of life that we want to sustain in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think you would find a soul in Saskatchewan who would disagree with the notion we would like to see and want to see and are working to see population growth. The question is, the question is how to achieve that growth.

Do you achieve the growth with the kind of economic and social policies that the member from Swift Current is so familiar with, the kind of right-wing social and economic policies? Is that how you build in this province? Or do you do it with a plan that works with Saskatchewan people?

Now he started this most recent question with a tribute — and I share the tribute — to both Roy Romanow and Janice MacKinnon during their years in office. I share that tribute with one Mr. Ed Tchorzewski as he served in the ministry of Finance in this province. I share that tribute with the now Minister of Industry and Resources when he shared the Finance portfolio. And I share it with the current Minister of Finance.

But let me tell the Leader of the Opposition, let me tell the Leader of the Opposition when Standard & Poor do their credit ratings, they do it on current events. They do it on current affairs. They do it on current budgeting. And they are very specific in their report in looking at the work that this province has done in the last three years to manage its finances through a very, very difficult period of time. And they give us a credit upgrading.

Now, Mr. Chair, you can believe the member from Swift Current. You can believe the Saskatchewan Party, SP, or you can believe Standard & Poor of New York. And I'll believe Standard & Poor of New York 10 times out of 10, Mr. Chair.

Of course, Mr. Chair, of course we want to see new population. We want to, Mr. Chair, take full advantage of the young people of Saskatchewan today. We want to give our young people opportunity, first opportunity in our province. We want to take full advantage of our Aboriginal young people in this province. We want to provide the educational opportunities. We want to provide the employment opportunities.

But, Mr. Chair, we're reaching out. We're reaching out not just through economic opportunity, but we're reaching out for the first time in Saskatchewan's history, I venture to say, since the days of the homestead. We are reaching out through the process of immigration to other parts of Canada. I've talked about Albertans who are moving to Saskatchewan . . . to reach out through immigration to the continent, to reach out through immigration to the world — Central America, South America, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, Britain — to draw people, to draw people to this province.

Yes to see population increase, yes to see stronger communities, yes to see a more vibrant economy, and yes to see a more vibrant future for all people of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(15:45)

**Mr. Wall:** — Well the Premier should be doing more than giving tribute to those departed members like Mr. Romanow and Ms. MacKinnon. He desperately needs them on his front bench. Arguably the province does, Mr. Speaker . . . or Mr. Chairman, because clearly since this Premier has taken over, since he's taken over . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's the Provincial Auditor's numbers, not mine.

The people viewing these proceedings or the people that will read this in *Hansard* one day will know that the Provincial Auditor or the province of Saskatchewan clearly said to anybody that was interested, this Premier inherited about a half billion dollar surplus on a summary financial statement for Mr. Romanow — that's what he inherited. And a few short years later, what did he turn it into? A half billion dollar roughly deficit, a billion and a half more in debt — these truly are your tax-and-spend social democrats, Mr. Chairman. And it's unfortunate.

And I would say this to the Premier: if he does believe — and it's a half-hearted belief I would submit, based on his answers so far — if he does believe that our long-term hope in Saskatchewan is a greater population base, a greater tax base, he ought to share that with his members.

He ought to share that with the member from Regina Wascana, who mocked, mocked the population targets that we had set, in a local paper — I think in the Arm River-Watrous constituency — openly mocked them, said Saskatchewan ought not to aspire to population growth; it wasn't even possible. One per cent, the national average, she said, it wasn't possible.

That particular member at the back there, the member for Saskatchewan Rivers, what did he say? The Premier says, oh they do believe the province has to grow. And here's what the member from Saskatchewan Rivers said in his Throne Speech

intervention:

What I hear instead (he's talking about us) is grow, grow, grow. Grow this province; grow the population; grow industry; grow the economy. Mr. Speaker, this is a meaningless mantra.

That's what the member from Saskatchewan Rivers had to say. So the Premier ought to come clean and let the people of the province know which is it. Now that he's being asked direct questions, he's in favour of a growth agenda and in favour of population growth, but his members, his members don't agree.

And while he's on his feet, he can answer a specific question. You know the Premier has written to all the party leaders in Saskatchewan . . . I beg your pardon, in Canada, that are currently obviously engaged in the federal election campaign — I shouldn't say all of them; I presume Mr. Layton, Mr. Harper, and Mr. Martin — on the issue of equalization.

And I believe I know that he has received a response now back from Mr. Harper, and maybe he's received responses back from the other leaders. Maybe he's received a response back from Mr. Martin or Mr. Layton. I wonder could he highlight for members of the committee what response he has received from each of the federal leaders on this issue of changes to the equalization formula.

**The Chair:** — Why is the member on her feet?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — With permission to introduce guests.

**The Chair:** — The member has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

## INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't be happier than to introduce my good friend and former MLA for the Lloydminster area, Violet Stanger, and friend. I apologize; I don't know your friend's name. Certainly this is a very astute politician who continues to provide advice and observations from time to time. And we're so busy in the House, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the only ways we can get to see each other. So we appreciate Vi coming down to the legislature today to watch the proceedings.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

### General Revenue Fund

### Executive Council

### Vote 10

### Subvote (EX01)

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, it is certainly of interest to members on this side of the House, and I'm sure to the people

of Saskatchewan, the glowing reviews that the Leader of the Opposition gives to those who deserve glowing reviews — that being Roy Romanow, and Janice MacKinnon, and others who have served in government benches. But, Mr. Chair, when those members — when Mr. Romanow was sitting at this bench and Ms. McKinnon was sitting in the seat of the finance — I mean these same people suggested they were the worst plagues to ever appear on Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh yes, oh yes.

And now you see he wants to . . . this leader wants to quote members. Well the member from Kindersley, as I speak, is flying out of his seat, waving his arms. Well it's the member from Kindersley who now takes a view that Premier Douglas was the worst thing that was ever vested on the people of Saskatchewan. Now he nods and he says it's true. Well these folks, you see, will pick and choose for their own political convenience.

But the record, the record, Mr. Chair — forget the political convenience of the Saskatchewan Party — the record is as follows: when we assumed government in 1991 — I was proud to be part of that government — when we assumed government in 1991, the percentage of debt to the GDP (gross domestic product) of Saskatchewan was 61.7 — 61.7.

That was clearly the result of the economic and social policies of the Saskatchewan Party, then known as the Conservatives, in our province. That was directly a result of the policies, the right-wing policies being advanced over there in the 1980s; the same policies which are being advanced today. We ended up with a debt to GDP ratio of 61.7 per cent — arguably the worst in Canada.

Today as a result of the fiscal prudence and management of the Romanow years and now the most recent years, our debt to GDP is down to 33.7 per cent.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thirty-three point seven.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Now that, Mr. Chair, may not be recognized by the member from Swift Current because I'm not sure what school of economics he attended. But I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, it is recognized a year ago by Moody's of New York City — Moody's of New York City, who a year ago gave us a credit upgrade. It is recognized this year by Standard & Poor's of New York City, who this year, on the basis of this budget and this economic performance, gave the people of Saskatchewan a credit upgrade.

Now they can, they can make all the political partisan speeches they want. It didn't work in the fall because, you see, the people of Saskatchewan see right through it. They come in here and they say, one day, they say one day . . . well I'll tell you they're racking up the debt. They're spending too much, the spend socialist, the spend social democrats. That's just what he said.

But isn't it interesting, Mr. Chair, that on a daily basis member after member after member over there stands up and says, spend

more. Spend more. You name it, you name it, they say spend more. Just today I heard it again. They want us to spend more in health care. They want us to spend more in education. They want us to spend more in highways. They want us to spend more in the economy. They want up to spend on every front, Mr. Chair.

But when we do invest in the priority areas, then they stand up — as the Leader of the Opposition just did — and said, you're spending too much. Now the leader . . . the member from — where is it — Kindersley, Kindersley says we should not invest in film and video in this province.

Well I invite the member of Kindersley to just take a little tour, today if he could, down to the sound stage here in Saskatchewan, down to the sound stage and see the filming of the lead hit series in Canada, *Corner Gas*, being done right here in Saskatchewan, right here in Regina and right out in Rouleau.

Let him go down and look at the investment. Look at the young people at work. Look at the \$45 million of activity, and then tell the people of Saskatchewan we shouldn't have anything to do with the film and video industry. We shouldn't be investing. Mr. Chair, this opposition can't have it all ways.

They say over and over again, spend, spend, spend, spend. Then they say, you're spending too much. Then they say, you should cut all the taxes. Then they say, you should balance the budget. Well we saw them at work in the 1980s. We know what it did to the province of Saskatchewan; we ended up with a debt to the GDP of 61.7.

Again, Mr. Chair, I say I'll take the word of Moody's and Standard & Poor's 10 times over 10 of the word of the Saskatchewan Party.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the Premier has any thoughts on the question — what have the federal leadership candidates responded to in terms of the equalization formula? And of those responses he has received, which one is best for Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I understand that I received, late on Friday afternoon, a response from one of the federal leaders. I am told this morning that the other responses are likely to arrive today.

I plan, as soon as I have each of the federal responses, to identify and make them very public simultaneously. I think out of some sense of fairness to the major political parties in Canada, in the middle of the election, I want to make them all public. And I understand they should be in our hands by the end of this day. I am pleased that the federal leaders are responding at the invitation of my letter.

I would again ask the Leader of the Opposition has he, as Leader of the Opposition, written to the federal parties? Has he met with any of the federal officials or federal elected people? What is it that he's been busy doing to support the people of Saskatchewan for a fair equalization?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — My understanding of the response which is posted to their Web site of at least the Conservative Party of candidate . . . or the Conservative Party of Canada is basically in agreement with the Government of Saskatchewan on every point, including returning to a 10-province standard that excludes non-renewable resource revenues from the equalization formula.

I also understand Mr. Layton said similar things when he was here, one or . . . He's been here on a couple of occasions already, I think. And obviously, we know what the Liberal position is.

So again, I'd ask the Premier, I mean, that's certain public domain information. He would know what is . . . or could have access to these positions. Does he have a view as to which is certainly better for Saskatchewan in terms of . . . Well, and let's be specific. There's really only two political parties in the country right now that have a chance to form the national government.

We in the Saskatchewan Party know that we have members of our party that are supporting and some are candidates for the federal Liberal Party. We have supporters and candidates running for the federal Conservative Party.

But certainly, of the two, on the issue of equalization, there are some differences. Those are the two parties that have a chance to form . . .

**The Chair:** — Order, order. Members, I have to be able to hear the member who has the floor, so I would ask hon. members to please keep the discussion at a little lower level. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Of the two national parties now who have commented on equalization that have a chance at forming the national government, which one does the Premier believe would be more friendly, more positive for the province of Saskatchewan — as it relates to the equalization issue, which seems to be an issue of underlying importance that runs across his government?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well let me say this, Mr. Chair. Of course I think prime minister Layton would provide the best deal for the province of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I am aware, I am aware of the public pronouncements that have been made very specifically by Mr. Harper, as Leader of the Conservative Party, where he has talked about the 10-province standard, excluding natural resources.

We have had very recently, Mr. Jack Layton, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, in the province talking about a fair deal for equalization.

I have not received at this . . . coming into the House, I had not received from Mr. Martin, the Leader of the Liberal Party,

precise response to my letter.

I want to be fair. I mean I want to be able to disclose these simultaneously. And I'll want to judge the letters. I've written for specific information. Yes I know what we're saying publicly but I want to know what the leaders will say very specifically to the letter.

We will be very supportive of those positions. A 10-province standard would be good for Saskatchewan. It may not be the only answer that's good for Saskatchewan . . . that would be good for Saskatchewan.

We've said, since the beginning of the most recent discussion after the Courchene paper, that at a minimum Saskatchewan needs restoration of those monies which have been inappropriately clawed back when the equalization clawback has been more than a dollar per dollar, and an accord or a pact or an arrangement with the federal government under equalization that would provide for the people of Saskatchewan and our resources the same kinds of protections that are being offered to Atlantic Canada. A 10-province standard would be good. Accord may meet our needs.

Clearly we want some retroactivity in terms of monies being owed. I'm wanting to hear from the leaders in a concrete way, by letter, that we can compare and then let the people of Saskatchewan see the responses. And I would say let the people of Saskatchewan decide as we go the polls at the end of June.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier, Mr. Chair. And we look forward to the Premier's comments when he's received the letters from all of the national parties.

And on the subject of the federal election, there's been some other discussion by the Premier's cousins . . . he likes the word cousins. Well the Premier has cousins of his own in Ottawa. And they're proposing some very specific things that I think he should be on the record here in the province of Saskatchewan.

They are proposing an inheritance tax on the property and the savings of seniors who have built up . . . through a lot of hard work and through a number of years, they've built up their savings. I wonder, has the Premier highlighted clearly for his federal counterpart how this is not positive and not well-received in the province of Saskatchewan? I wonder if he'd comment on that.

(16:00)

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I'm a little surprised at the direction the opposition leader wants us to take in this House. It seems to me there are many, many, many provincial issues, many issues that I believe the Leader of the Opposition would want to question government. To engage in a debate here about federal election policies strikes me as a bit odd.

You will know the position of this government when it comes to taxation when you see the budgets that we produce. When you see the policy choices we make, you know the position of this government. And I repeat, it is the choices that we've made in this province that have now earned us a credit rating upgrade from Standard & Poor just last week.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well I think it is important. There is a federal election going on right now. And here's an opportunity for the people of the province to hear from their Premier on pronouncements that are being made by his party — the party that he's a proud member of, a party that he has very publicly supported as they've come through town. As Mr. Layton has come through town this Premier of this province has been there, shoulder to shoulder with him.

This is a leader, a federal leader who advocates no change to the gun registry, for example. I think that issue is important in the province of Saskatchewan. This is the leader who is calling for an inheritance tax. I think that's important to the people of the province of Saskatchewan. This is a leader — his leader, his leader — that's also proposing some changes to the Canada pension fund to fund some sort of home renovation fund. Mr. Speaker, a headline in a recent article was, "NDP used CPP money to finance home improvements." I think that has some people concerned and with questions, people here in the province of Saskatchewan.

It happens to be we're two weeks away from a federal election. Here's a chance for the people of the province to hear their Premier stand up and say, you know, this is my party — but they're dead wrong on the gun control, they are dead wrong on an inheritance tax, or on potentially undermining the Canada pension fund to implement some sort of home renovation program.

And I just want to give him a chance, on the record here in Premier's estimates, to do that on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, again I am surprised, when we have this opportunity to discuss the decisions made and being implemented by the Government of Saskatchewan, that the Leader of the Opposition wants to divert into some conversation about federal electoral policies.

Now I'll discuss federal policies when they have an important effect on the province of Saskatchewan. It's right that we should be discussing equalization. But if he wants to start commenting on every party platform in the current federal election . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well perhaps he'd like to comment on the Conservative Party's platform. How would he like to comment on this discussion we hear about a coalition Bloc-Conservative government in Ottawa? How would he like to comment on that?

Mr. Chair, we are here to do the business of the people of Saskatchewan. We have some very significant, very significant issues to discuss here. I'm not going to engage in a federal campaign in this House. I think we should get down to the business of discussing matters of the province and the people of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, the Premier doesn't want to talk about those issues because he's embarrassed, or at least I hope he is. I hope he's embarrassed about what his federal counterparts are proposing for this country and what the impact that would be on this province of Saskatchewan. That's why he

doesn't want to talk about these issues and so we will move on, Mr. Chairman. We're going to move on to some issues.

We're going to move on specifically to a litany, a sad and unfortunately long litany of promises that were made in the election campaign by this Premier, and promises that were broken. Because everywhere I go — and I have had a chance to travel all over the province here in the last three or four months — everywhere I go, people are asking the same question with the same tone of disappointment.

And that's what . . . It's not a tone of anger even. If it was anger, then the government should even be more worried than they probably are already. It's a tone of disappointment that you hear in Saskatchewan. Because I think a lot of people, as they followed the last campaign, I think that there was a level of trust that they had. And even though polls consistently showed that the people of the province wanted to change, they wanted change, people were concerned about a number of issues. And so because they arguably trusted the Premier, they may have held their nose and voted against change, in fact, voted for the Premier.

And for those who don't know the Premier very well — and I guess I'd be among those, Mr. Chairman — it has been disappointment. Because I think people's initial impressions — and you know maybe they are the true impressions; I don't know — are quite agreeable. The initial impressions are one that people had, of trust.

What has been so disappointing for the people of the province and disappointing for us . . . And I remember when we were debating in the legislature — the Premier and I, early on in a question period — and the Premier got up and as if it was some sort of moment of victory, he noted the tone of disappointment on this side of the House. There was no victory in the disappointment the people of the province feel because, Mr. Chairman, it is born out of the fact that someone that many of them trusted, someone that many of them, you know, marked their X by, in a very . . . obviously an important moment in anyone's life when they do, when they cast their ballot in an election, has systematically broken promises that were made in the campaign.

So I want to ask the Premier that. I want to ask the Premier how soon after it was after the provincial election on November 5 had he decided to break his promise to continue to cut taxes. We obviously saw a PST increase in the last budget. How soon after the election did he decide that he would break his promise to the people to continue to cut taxes?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I'm very, very proud to have in my hand the platform document that we took to the people of Saskatchewan. I tell you, days after the election we didn't wipe our platform document out of existence; no, not like the Saskatchewan Party did. No, I'm very proud of this document.

This document, this platform will guide this government, not just for six months or eight months; this document will guide this government for four years, for the four-year mandate, Mr. Chair.

And I remind you and I remind members and I remind the

people of Saskatchewan, we have a four-year mandate. We set a platform for a four-year mandate. Have we accomplished all that is within this platform in six or eight months? No, we have not; no, we have not. But we have accomplished a great deal of what is in this platform.

Now the Leader of the Opposition will engage in the kind of attack that we've heard here today and heard it throughout the session, with very little reference to fact, very little reference to fact and absolutely no reference to what he or what they would do differently. Not a hint of that.

Now that can lead you to only one conclusion or perhaps two. One, they don't know what they would do; or two, they don't want to share what they would do, because when they did in the campaign, the people of Saskatchewan rejected it — in fact, rejected it in greater numbers than they did in the previous election. So you saw the popular vote of the New Democratic Party grow in the last general election.

Now the fact of the matter is this, Mr. Chair, when you assume the benches of government you no longer have the kind of opposition luxury that exists over there, where you can spend everywhere, and cut taxes, and balance the budget. When we have choices to make, we make what we believe are the most responsible choices. This year we completed the most significant, the most significant renovation of personal income tax in this province's history. We set out a long-term plan; we've put that plan in place.

This year we needed to find for the provision of health care in this province some 173 million new dollars, just for health care alone. That represents, Mr. Chair, 173 new dollars for every person in our province — just new dollars — to bring our total budget to 2.7 billion. To do that, Mr. Chair, we raised the provincial sales tax. We raised the provincial sales tax which will provide for the treasury of Saskatchewan and for health care in the neighbourhood of 130 or \$132 million. Therefore we had to find even other sources of revenue to fund health care.

What did we say to the people of Saskatchewan in the election? We said that health care is our number one public health . . . public policy, social policy priority. We have made the decisions to give that commitment reality.

Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition, I'm sure, will have a litany. I'd like him to do two things: show us some facts instead of just rhetoric, and tell us just once, just tell us just once what would he do differently.

You see, Mr. Chair, at the beginning of this session the Leader of the Opposition and the members over there said they would bring this government down in a moment's notice. At their earliest opportunity, they would bring this government down. Now that says to me they must therefore be prepared to govern. If they are prepared to govern, then it's time they started telling the people of Saskatchewan how they would govern.

And if they don't think that \$173 million is enough money for health, then please would the Leader of the Opposition stand up today and tell us just how much money should we spend in health. And if we're not spending enough in post-secondary education, please tell us what the number should be. If we're

not spending enough in Highways or in programs to support our farm families, or if we're not cutting enough tax in some area, I'd like him to stand up today and tell the people of Saskatchewan something specific. Let's just try and move on a bit from all the rhetoric that we hear, from the histrionics, and let's have a debate.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well thank you for that very special answer. I mean, it doesn't really come close to the question, frankly, Mr. Chairman.

The Premier said in his campaign platform, the one he waved around and said he was so very, very proud of, he said . . . And let me just make this point to the Premier. The election platform of the Saskatchewan Party is widely available. The policies of the party are there.

And we also went to the people with a great and detailed platform of exactly what we would do and, for good or for ill, the people of the province — who are never wrong in these matters — chose his government. They asked him to be the Premier. Not by much, mind you, but they did. They gave him a majority government and they asked him to implement his plan. That's what they asked, or by their voting on election day they were saying, we believe what you have to say, we are comfortable with what you have to say by a slim majority. We ask you to implement it. In this platform, Mr. Chairman, his promise to the people of the province of Saskatchewan, he says that he will continue to cut taxes. This budget increased taxes, increased all manner of services, and increased the PST by 1 per cent.

I'm asking him now to tell the people of the province . . . They have a right to know because he asked them to vote for him on November 5, many of them did . . . Now they have a right to know, when did you know that you couldn't keep this promise?

Did you know before November 5? Did you know before you made the promise? Did you know after you made the promise? Certainly you would think it would have been before because they were in control. They had the access to the finances of the province.

Just answer the question. When did he know that his promise made in the platform wasn't worth the paper it was written on?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, again I remind the member opposite, the members of the House, and the citizens who may be listening, that when we lay out a platform, we don't lay it out for six months. We lay it out for four years.

Have we achieved everything in this platform? No, we have not. We will achieve, over our mandate, the platform we've laid out for the people of Saskatchewan.

Now the Leader of the Opposition, he should know — he's spent some time in government — but perhaps he's forgotten that each and every budget year, governments must seriously consider the state of the economy; governments must seriously consider the demands of programming for the people of Saskatchewan. We must consider available revenues, and you

must make choices.

I repeat, I repeat, Mr. Chair, that in this budget year, as we sat down post the election, it was very clear to us that if we were going to maintain the quality of health care service in this province that the people deserve and demand, it was going to take significant new resources — if we were going to maintain our investments in the highways and roads infrastructure, if we were going to continue to add new resources to K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) education.

Now we could have, as some governments have done very recently, instituted a large health care premium on the people of Saskatchewan. We could have done that. Or as some other governments have done in this country, we could have legislated wage rollbacks to those who are providing health care to our . . . (inaudible) . . . We could have done that. We chose, in a difficult budget set of choices, to raise the provincial sales tax.

Now if the Leader of the Opposition does not like a raise of the provincial sales tax — of which every dollar is going to health care — if the Leader of the Opposition does not like that, then would he please stand and once responsibly tell us what we should have done. Does he recommend that we should have installed a health care premium? Does he recommend that we should roll back the wages of health care providers?

(16:15)

Would he just once . . . If he doesn't think \$173 million is enough new money for health care, then let him stand up and tell us how much should it be — 180, 200 million, 250? Please, give us an answer.

You see, Mr. Chair, the circumstance here is that this Leader of the Opposition and that opposition say they will bring the government down at a moment's notice — at a moment's notice. Well then, what are the plans they would have? How would they budget? What would they do? Because it's a deafening silence except for the chitter-chatter that comes from the back bench over there.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, this is why the Premier's conduct over the last number of months, and the conduct of this NDP government, is so disappointing to the people of the province of Saskatchewan, that answer that we just heard.

This Premier was the Premier prior to the election. They were in government. This Premier can't now stand up and claim well, we didn't know about all of the stuff . . .

**The Chair:** — Order. Order. Hon. Members, I have been listening to some of the extracurricular comments that have been thrown across the floor and they're getting dangerously close to being unparliamentary. So I'd caution . . . I would ask the members to exercise caution in their extra comments over the floor.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, this is why people in the province are very disappointed because, I think, they thought that even though they wanted change, they gave their trust to the Premier and his party. And what they've got since then is a lot of broken promises.

And what really, I think, what really frustrates people is that this isn't a former opposition leader coming to be the Premier and legitimately saying well, he opened the books and we didn't realize how bad things were. This isn't even that. And by the way, I think voters are getting increasingly frustrated with that, as we witness what's happening in Ontario.

But I think what's frustrating is that . . . And the member for Regina Qu'Appelle, the Minister of Agriculture, is chirping from his seat. He too — he too sat in the government caucus prior to the election. They knew the financial situation of Saskatchewan. They knew that.

And still, they made promises to cut taxes. Not over the life of their government. There was clear meaning behind the words, or at least people took those words from the Premier at face value; that those promises were current; that they could depend on those promises in the short and the near term; that what the Premier said in the campaign, he would do. And that's why there is a great deal of disappointment.

And the member from Qu'Appelle is the one that's chirping. You know, they campaigned hard, to give them full marks, give this party full marks for how they campaigned. That particular member campaigned very hard, to the point, to the point where he would go to seniors in his own riding who had a Sask Party lawn sign, if you can imagine, Mr. Chairman, and tell them that they should take that sign down because the Saskatchewan Party would take away their health care, Mr. Chairman. That's what he said . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well he says now that's not what he said, Mr. Chairman. He says that's not what he said. That's what the couple said. So now he's accusing them of not telling the truth. Eventually they put that sign back up. They took his sign down and put it back up. That's the kind of campaign the Premier ran.

Fair enough, fair enough; he was successful. But then it is incumbent on the Premier to tell the people of the province at what point did he know he couldn't keep the promises that he was making; at what point did he know that instead of, as he says here in his platform, instead of more nurses and health professionals, he would be cutting those positions. He discovered that at some point.

I would say, suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, he knew that prior to the election of November 5, and that's what we'd like him to tell us today. He can, he can turn over a new leaf; he can be straight with the people of the province of Saskatchewan on this issue and tell them that he knew the fiscal situation of the province and he knew his own priorities and he didn't intend to keep his promise on health care professionals or continuing to cut taxes.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, you see the flights of political rhetoric that arise from the member of Swift Current, with no

fact. In fact, he and other members — and we will discuss this later this day — how he and other members will stand in this House and say virtually anything about anyone, and we are going to discuss this before this is over. Now, no facts, no facts. Now we're going to, we're going just review, we're going to just review some of the facts, Mr. Chair. We're going to review just some of the facts.

I have here a chart that talks about taxes on a two-income family of four in the province of Saskatchewan earning about \$50,000. Now in 1993 that family was paying in tax in Saskatchewan, between provincial income, sales, and gasoline tax, that family in 1993 was paying \$5,246 in provincial taxes alone, provincial taxes along. That, that now, Mr. Chair, has been on a very, very, very steady decline so that last year that same family . . . Well let me just, just hold. Mr. Chair, we'll go back to, let's just talk about the year 2001. That family then was paying not \$5,246, but in 2001 was paying \$3,972. In 2002, \$3,789; in 2003, \$3,613; and in 2004, 3,644. An increase in this budget year, fair enough, of \$31 — of \$31 on average. From a height of 5,246 in 1993 now to 3,644. Now that's about \$1,600 in tax benefit.

I say, Mr. Chair, that's not a bad tax record — not a bad tax record. And, Mr. Chair, as we have to wrestle through these past three years of some very difficult times, very difficult times, with drought, BSE, and so on, that we are able to provide this consistent level of tax relief and at the same time provide the quality public services in health care, education, highways, and in the economy, and meet the needs as best we can of producers in the livestock industry, well I say, Mr. Chair, that's not such a bad record.

But you know what I say or what the Leader of the Opposition says maybe isn't all that important. I'll tell you what's important. What's important is what a Standard & Poor bond rating agency says; what's important is what the people of Saskatchewan say.

And the people of Saskatchewan said in the fall, we've seen your record, we know that you will follow through on your commitments as you have. And, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Chair, that will be the practice, we have a four-year mandate, a four-year platform in front of us. And, Mr. Chair, when we're coming to the polls next time in about four years, don't worry we'll debate it again with the people of Saskatchewan, and my guess is they will again look at the right-wing policies over there and say those policies are not right for the people of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, in all of that maybe there's a ray of hope, maybe there's a light at the end of the rhetorical tunnel that the Premier's in. And maybe it's this. Maybe the Premier seems to be saying that well, people understood in the campaign that we didn't really mean that we'd keep our promises, we potentially would keep them maybe over a four-year term of government over some long horizon.

And the Premier now says, oh by the way, anybody who didn't believe that, that is what we meant. Anybody who didn't believe that . . . Anyone who made the mistake of taking me,

taking us at our word, anyone who did that, it's not really what we meant now. What we meant was over the four-year term.

Okay, fair enough. So the question to the Premier is this. He's increased the PST in his last budget by a point. He's saying now that he'll keep his promise for lower taxes in Saskatchewan over the term of his government. Would he please highlight for the Assembly when people can expect him to then reduce the PST by 1 per cent?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, in each and every year of this mandate we will deliver in this legislature a budget. A budget that will be balanced. A budget that will earn the kind of . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you see, Mr. Chair, when Standard & Poor says the budget of Saskatchewan is balanced, when the Moody investment house says that the budget of the province is balanced through good fiscal management, the Saskatchewan Party says well it is not balanced. Well again, Mr. Chair, whose word will you take and for what purpose?

Mr. Chair, in each and every year this government will provide to this legislature a budget; a budget that will make the appropriate choices based on the circumstances as we deal with them each and every year. Mr. Chair, we've laid out a four-year plan. We've laid out a plan that maintains balance in the budget. We've laid out a plan that will maintain our good credit rating. We're never again going to put ourselves in the position that that group put this province in in the 1980s — never again, Mr. Chair. Never again.

But you know what the Leader of the Opposition of course will not want to talk about much today are the many commitments in this platform document that have already, already been reached. He won't want to talk about that.

He won't want to talk about our commitment to provide new revenue-sharing dollars for our municipalities — done in this budget. He won't want to talk about our commitment to creating jobs in this province, when you see the kind of record employment levels coming in April and May; he won't want to talk about that. He won't want to talk about the commitments that we're investing in — for instance, the green economy of wind power. He won't want to talk about the green teams being put into place.

He won't want to talk about very much the new investments we're putting into health care, into CT (computerized tomography) scanners, just as we committed; into bursaries for health care providers, just as we committed; into a new MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), new diagnostic equipment, just as we committed. He doesn't want to talk about the institution now of our surgical waiting list, our wait list target times. He won't want to talk about that — all committed in this platform document.

He won't want to talk about the CareerStart program, which we committed to in this platform. He won't want to talk about that because we're instituting it. He won't want to talk about those things which are being completed — no, no.

And I'll tell you what else he won't want to talk about. He doesn't want to talk about their policy. He sure doesn't want to talk about their policy. Nothing to say about their policy. He



said, well we're going to make one up next February sometime; in the meantime, just trust me.

He says, we're going to stretch, we're going to be a new opposition. Mr. Speaker — Mr. Chair, sorry — Mr. Chair, we have not seen anything new in this opposition. In fact, I think we see a weaker opposition today than we had when the member from Rosetown was leading over there. Absolutely.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — You know, Mr. Chairman, the question was pretty simple again to the Premier. We asked him when it is he's going to keep his promise. In the campaign he promised lower taxes for Saskatchewan families; he increased the PST by a point. The Premier says, well I didn't . . . he explains his broken promise by saying, well I meant over the term of the government. So will the Premier just commit today that he's going to reduce that PST that he increased by that point, at least just to get us to where we were? Will he do that over the first term? Is that what he's saying, and if so, when? Will he answer that question?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, one day, one day they say, one day they say, the most significant thing you need to do is to lower the taxes on the property. That's the thing they say. That was yesterday's version, I guess. Today's version is now we should commit to lowering the PST. What will they have us commit to next week? Lowering corporate taxes, I suppose.

Well, Mr. Chair, that's not how it works on the government benches. It works in opposition; on any given day you can get up and have a new idea and call for something new or call for new spending. Doesn't work that way in government, Mr. Chair. You have to make decisions; you have to make decisions on a four-year plan. You have to build that plan.

And, Mr. Chair, again I submit the record of this government, as validated now by Moody's of New York City, Standard & Poor's of New York City, the record of this government in fiscal management stands against any record of any government in Canada. We are the government, we are the people, we are the province who are getting credit rating upgrades, Mr. Chair.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Chairman, what the people of the province want, what the people of Saskatchewan want is for this Premier, in terms of keeping commitments, is simply to keep his. He made them in the election campaign.

And now the Premier kind of skates around all . . . It's why there is this amazing sentiment of absolute disappointment in this Premier. Because I think even those who thought his government to be incompetent when they looked at SPUDCO and when they looked at all of these losses that they were incurring, when they looked at the fact that this Premier was turning, this Premier was turning balanced budgets under Mr. Romanow into huge deficits, into added debt, they looked at the Premier and thought, I'm not sure this Premier is confident, but there was a trust that they had there.

And if the Premier wonders why that's going away, if he's

wondering why that trust seems to be going away as he travels the province, he ought to, he ought to simply listen to his answers. He ought to listen to his answers. He promised to cut taxes. In, I think, in January of this year — this year, Mr. Chairman — he was asked by CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) did he have a mandate to increase the PST. His answer was one word: no. That's what he said. That's what he said in January. His answer was no. In his campaign specifically — specifically now — in his platform, page 14, the Premier says . . . this is what the Premier says under the category of "Index tax credits and brackets to keep pace with inflation."

(16:30)

Here's another example. This is not a top-of-mind example. People are more concerned about long-term care beds — rightfully so — or an increase in the PST. But you know what? In terms of equivalency, it's still a promise. It's black and white commitment by the Premier. That's the kind of commitment we want to talk to him about today, and we want him to ask questions in that Executive Council estimates. Here's what he said.

We've worked hard to ensure Saskatchewan has Canada's fairest provincial tax system. Now we need to ensure . . . (the) inflation can't allow unfairness to creep back in.

As of January 1, 2004, provincial tax credits and . . . three income tax brackets will be indexed . . .

I don't know, I don't know where the Premier comes from, but where I come from people would take that to mean, will be indexed, Mr. Chairman, because that's what it says:

. . . ensuring Saskatchewan's tax reductions keep up with inflation.

What happened in this budget? What happened in this budget that the Premier personally approved? He approved the fact that the reductions would not be, would not be adjusted for bracket . . . for inflation, Mr. Chairman. He specifically broke that promise. So again, if it's the Premier's contention — and it's a painful one for the people of the province — but if it's his contention that, well I'm going to keep this promise over the term of my government, I want him to stand up and say that specifically about this issue and give the taxpayers a timeline. Not even a specific date, but a ballpark even. He made the promise. When will it be kept?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, in terms of the indexing of the income tax benefit in this budget, if the Leader of the Opposition would care to . . .

**The Chair:** — Order. Members, I have been warning the House quite regularly on comments — personalized comments — and they're now degenerating into what I would classify as personal insults. And I don't want to take them . . . Order. I don't want to take the next step of singling members out and asking them to withdraw and apologize to the House. But to warn members, I will do that on the next step.

I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. If the Leader of the Opposition would give some study to the budget, he would know and would admit in this House that in fact the indexation is in place for the year 2004 for the budget. What he would also recognize is that indexation is in place for budgets in the future.

The only difference this year — because we believe, Mr. Chair, this is a responsible decision for us to make — is that each and every year the level of that indexation will be set by government of the day. Whether it's this government or their government, that level of indexation will be set — that, Mr. Chair, to achieve what we think are the responsible choices that often need to be made, Mr. Chair.

Now again, I plead with the Leader of the Opposition to stand once today in this debate and offer an alternative, offer an alternative. He doesn't like an increase to the PST. He doesn't like increases to any other fee or charge or service. He wants us to spend and spend and spend on program after program after program, or his members stand up and do, and I assume he supports his members.

So would we hear today from the leader of the Saskatchewan Party, if in government what choices would they make? How much would they spend on health care? How much would they spend on highways? Which tax would they raise or cut? Could we hear at least one specific? Or is it truly the case they have a policy they do not want to share with the people of Saskatchewan?

**Mr. Wall:** — Yes, there's the sound of one hand clapping, Mr. Chairman, because, because, because the Premier . . . I mean I just read it from the platform; that promise couldn't be more specific. It doesn't say, over life of our government. There are no wiggle words like that in there. There are none. It's why it's actions like we have witnessed on that issue, where the government would flip-flop, the government . . . the Premier himself would personally authorize the breaking of a specific promise like that. It's why the Premier himself would have said back on May 31, '91:

Mr. Speaker, when you have betrayed the trust of those who have elected you, I argue, Mr. Speaker, you have no mandate. You have no mandate left.

And that's what the Premier of this province said back in 1991. Back in 1989, Mr. Speaker, here's what I said — and I'll read it into the record again:

When a political party goes to the people before an election and says one thing (and says one thing), and then having won the election, after the election turns and does just the opposite, Mr. Speaker, (it) . . . makes a sham (out) of parliamentary democracy.

The Premier, the Premier was absolutely right when he said that as the member for Moose Jaw back on July 25, 1989. But he seems to have forgotten all of that. He seems to have forgotten what he said at the end of May in 1991 because we could go down the list — and we have throughout the session — of all of the broken promises, that is a specific one. And we may get a chance to return to them. But again you hear no answer from the Premier.

And the Premier ought not to be surprised then if the people of the province simply don't believe things that his party's going to say into the future, that he will say into the future, because the track record, the track record is clear. The track record is say whatever you need to say in a campaign, say whatever you need to say about your own platform, and say whatever you need to say about your opponents. Just get elected.

That's the philosophy that that Premier follows over there. And I guess that's fair enough. That's his business. He can follow that. I happen to think, Mr. Chairman, though that while it apparently worked on November 5, I'm not sure it's going to work again. I think the people of the province have seen that movie.

Mr. Chairman, the Throne Speech, the Premier's Throne Speech had some interesting and I would say positive elements in it that I'd like to explore a little bit about, because we frankly haven't seen the specifics on them.

Mr. Speaker . . . or Mr. Chairman of committees, on page 9 of the printed Throne Speech that I have, I'm going to quote here. It says . . . It's a section on health care and it says:

To achieve this . . .

In other words . . . Well I'll read the whole paragraph.

Guided by the Saskatchewan Action Plan on Health, we will continue to do more for health care. (This is the government's Throne Speech.) The public expects that our health resources meet the most pressing needs of the people. To achieve this, our government will assess how health dollars are used with a view to ensuring the resources are used more effectively for the benefit of Saskatchewan people.

When I heard the Lieutenant Governor read those words, I thought to myself well, that sounds a lot like a value-for-money exercise — a value-for-money audit.

Members of that party openly mocked when we proposed that as an alternative in the '99 campaign and since. In fact I can remember the then leader of the government, the premier who was a very effective debater, shout across at us the fact that this was nothing but a Texas-style audit. I think that's what Mr. Romanow used to call it. Fair enough. But this reference in the Throne Speech sounds a little bit like that.

So the question is this: what does this reference in the Throne Speech mean? Is the Premier committed to something — by the way, that we would support — an exercise to determine that the massive resources that we are committing to health care in this province are being used most effectively, are getting to the front line in the best possible way and not getting lost along the way in other attendant issues in the health care system?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, before moving on to discussion of the Throne Speech and commitments around health care and the Throne Speech, the member from Swift Current gave us quite a little speech about comments that I may have made in the late 1980s and as late as 1991.

Well he well knows, he well knows what provoked those comments at that time. Those comments were made about a government of which he was an employee, when he was attending the school of governance in this building at that time. And we had reached 1991. And that government of that party opposite had gone five years — five years, Mr. Chair — without calling an election, abusing the right of power, Mr. Chair. You bet I'd make some of those comments. You bet.

Now you see, he wants us to conveniently forget that. He wants us to very conveniently forget the record of that philosophy and some of those very members in government in this province. He wants us to forget what these folks did to constituents of theirs when they came to this House elected as Conservatives, as Liberals, committed to their parties, committed to their constituents.

And what did they do, Mr. Chair? I tell you, that group of men and women were so ashamed of their history in government, so ashamed of their party name, they got themselves together down here in a downtown restaurant in Regina, and they just changed the name. And they assumed that would let people forget.

Did they go to their constituents? Did they go to their people? Did they go to their people and seek by-election? Did they go to their people and seek the authorization of their citizens to do that? No, no, no, no. No, they didn't want to do that. They just wanted power, Mr. Chair. They just wanted power. And it's been that quest for power that has driven this group of men and women ever since that night in that downtown Regina restaurant.

And do you want to talk about a quest for power? They will do, they will say anything. They will attack individuals in this legislature. They can't debate policy because they're afraid to divulge the policies they have. We got a glimpse of it in the election, and the people said no. We're not interested in your policies of privatization. We're not interested in your policies of attacking working people. We're not interested in your policies of unsustainable tax cuts that would put us right back in the soup of deficit and debt. We're not interested in those policies.

They don't want to talk about their policies. They don't want to talk about their history. They haven't got a leader that they can ever point to. They attack Mr. Douglas. They attack or praise Mr. Romanow, given the day. They haven't got a leader they can point to. And they cannot discuss policy.

Well I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. You asked what it is. It's an exposure exactly of the kind of folks we have sitting in opposition today, led by a man who said he would change opposition. Led by a man who would stretch the opposition; they would be a more responsible opposition. Well, Mr. Chair, I tell you, a responsible opposition, a responsible opposition would have a leader who would once stand in the legislature just once and say what he would do if he occupied the office of Premier, if he occupied the benches of government. Would he give us just one suggestion?

No, he won't tell us how much they would spend on health care. He won't tell us how much they would spend on highways. He won't tell us how much they would spend on

education. He just says spend more, more, more, more. Then he says, but you've got to cut the property taxes one day. Comes in the next day and says, well you've got to reduce the sales taxes. He goes about to the people saying, well we've got to cut all the corporate taxes and the resource revenue fees and charges. You see, Mr. Chair, well I guess he has the luxury. They can do that. It hasn't got them to government thus far, and I'm not sure it ever, ever will.

Now he wants to debate health care. It's very helpful that he might want to debate health care today. Yes, we've talked about in our Throne Speech the need of working with the providers of health care in the province of Saskatchewan, working with . . . you can talk about the various providers — be it nurses, doctors — those who work in our facilities. We're going to work with administration. We're going to work with our health regions. We're going to work with a very strong Department of Health, one of the strongest in the country, Mr. Chair, to look at how our health care dollars can maximize the health care benefit for people.

Now he wants to characterize that as a value-for-money audit. I understand he was out in front of the press just the end of last week promoting this notion of the value-for-money audit. It's the one health care idea that they have, and they borrowed that from the former leader of the Liberal Party. It was the former leader of the Liberal Party that brought to the attention of, sort of the value-for-money audit.

We're not just interested, Mr. Chair, we're not just interested in going out and checking value for money. We're not going out just to check value for money because there is more to health care than just value for money. We want to see our health care dollars. We want to see them most effectively used.

But I want the Leader of the Opposition to say very clearly . . . is what he's supporting is simply applying value-for-money audit to health care? Because there's more to health care, there's more to health care than just finding the cheapest . . . the service that you can get. If that's what he's promoting, that we should do value for money, just go out and find the cheapest, bring in a bunch of auditors, not health care providers . . . He says bring in a third-party system and check this all out, try to find the cheapest way to do it. If that's what he's promoting, we're not interested in that.

We're interested, Mr. Chair, in working with the health care providers of Saskatchewan, with our own strong Department of Health, with our regional health authorities, with providers, and with Saskatchewan people to ensure that we're getting the best value for our health care dollars.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Chair, you know, the irony of course in a 12-minute answer about how we don't want to talk about anything substantive is that it was in an answer to what I think is a substantive question.

This, I said, is a positive notion that we find in this Premier's Throne Speech. So if he could just relax and calm down, maybe we can have a discussion about this.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Is this sort of just a general statement that the Department of Health will . . .

**The Chair:** — Order. I appreciate, members, that the heckles are no longer personal, but I would like to be able to hear what the member who has the floor has to say. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

(16:45)

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Chairman, so, you know, I guess what we're asking the Premier is pretty clear. He's got a specific reference to this in his Throne Speech:

. . . our government will assess how health dollars are used with a view to ensuring the resources are used most effectively for the benefit of Saskatchewan people.

Well, and that does frankly sound like the notion of a value-for-money audit, something that we did, we have talked about in the past. And this is where the Premier I think makes a bit of a mistake, because the Premier equates value only with money. Maybe a value-for-money audit, Mr. Chairman, may be the priority in that kind of an audit. The one, the review that we've talked about in this province, what is necessary, is about front-line patient care. Maybe that is the issue that we're trying to get to the bottom of when we talk about that kind of a review. Frankly that's at least the inference here in the Throne Speech.

So I want to find out a little bit more about what the Premier has in mind here. Because maybe it's something that we can get behind, something that we can support.

Specifically here's the question. I mean the Premier said, well it's . . . you know, we're going to kind of talk about it with health care workers and we're going to raise it with regions and our department officials will talk about this and stuff. You know, we want to know what specifically he's talking about. Is there a formal process? Is there someone tasked in his government within the Department of Health or within Executive Council to manage this process? Is there a terms of reference for it? Does it need a budget? Is it a formal review? Is there a start date? Is there an end date? Do they have some objectives in mind? Is it a substantive and constructive review that we would like to know more about and perhaps be able to support, Mr. Chairman?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, maybe we are finding some area of agreement. It will want to be not the kind of review that is going to be conducted by some third party auditing firm. It needs to be the kind of review that will involve, it will involve the administration of health care, the Department of Health, the regional health authorities, but beyond the administration, to involve the people who are providing health care. We want to challenge all of those who are involved in providing health care to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now when I read the transcript of the Leader of the Opposition's comments to the press on this issue, I get the feeling he's recommending a third party — a third party. If he has a suggestion about, in his view, who would be a good third

party for us to engage, this could become a . . . this might become a constructive discussion.

So I would invite the Leader of the Opposition — obviously he's suggesting this to the press — perhaps he could suggest the third party that he would recommend to conduct the kind of audit that perhaps both of us are talking about. Because we are both I believe talking about front-line patient care, front-line care for clients of the system, perhaps long-term care clients in rural Saskatchewan, or acute clients in our tertiary care centres.

What we're not interested in, and if this is the position of the Saskatchewan Party, then we're not interested in hauling in a bunch of auditors — whether they come from Texas or Montreal — to do just straight money audit on the health care system. Because, Mr. Chair, you could do that and I suppose there would be cost savings to be found, but I'm not sure we would achieve the same level or better patient care as a result of it.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well we do agree. Then we absolutely agree. And you know to whatever our resources could assist in in terms of determining a third party that could achieve that kind of a review, we would be happy to help.

I would suggest probably that the Department of Health with all of its resources, or any of the other departments of the government that the Premier has at his disposal, may have more resources to find a firm that will focus, that will focus on patient care, or perhaps an organization here within the country, perhaps those that are interested in health care in Canada.

And I guess that begs another question then. I'm assuming then that we now have the Premier telling us in the Assembly and telling the people of the province that that's what he means by this on page 9 of the Throne Speech, that he does mean a third-party review that's intended to find out if we are indeed utilizing our resources with the greatest amount of efficacy as is possible in terms of front-line patient care.

So if that's what he is saying then by this statement, the question is why wouldn't there be . . . Why wouldn't we want to do this first before we close any facilities for which there is a waiting list? Why wouldn't we want to find out the information that that kind of exercise could garner before we go ahead and either close facilities or beds for which there are waiting lists? These aren't in most cases, in almost every case, not empty beds that are sitting in a corner of a room in some hospital in Saskatchewan. They're beds that are occupied.

Does the Premier then agree, if that's what he means on page 9 of the Throne Speech, that we ought to do this first and then look at what needs to be done in the system with respect to facilities or beds?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, we obviously are not starting from ground zero. We had some years ago one of the most thorough reviews of the delivery of health care in Saskatchewan that I believe has ever been conducted in this province, under the leadership of Ken Fyke and the Fyke Commission, and there was a great deal of public discussion, a great deal of public input. We had, we had Mr. Fyke here in the Legislative Chamber.

As a result of that work, we developed the action plan for Saskatchewan health. Now health is never and will never be a static, a static program. We are always needing to make decisions and always need to be looking to the future for change. That will always be the case. In terms of decision making now, you cannot simply freeze-frame the system. It changes on a daily basis. And decisions have to be made on a daily, monthly, and annual basis when it comes to budgeting.

As we look forward, we believe there may well be opportunities to maximize, to make better use, to improve the utilization of the vast number of health care dollars that are in the system. Now we are not persuaded that the best way to do that is, as the Leader of the Opposition just suggested, we should go and seek a firm, a company, a group to come and do that.

A more effective tool we believe, are utilizing some of the resources that we now have in place. One of those resources, Mr. Chair, in place now in Saskatchewan — and for that matter, pioneering in Saskatchewan — is the presence and the establishment of a quality health council, who are looking at some of these very issues. We lobbied hard, worked hard, and we now see on a national level, a national quality health council. These bodies have some resources and they are doing some of this work. We want to, we want to ensure that we're in . . . that we're well synchronized here. It's not our view that we reach out to some firm and come into the province to review our system. We believe we have the resources here.

Those resources — some of which are in the Department of Health, some will be in regional health authorities, some will be in the capacity of the professional medical associations, some may well be in the capacity of health care workers and their trade unions — that's where we need to go, perhaps first of all to the people who deliver because they have the hands-on, first-hand experience. We believe there can be some savings or more appropriately, some better utilization of the health care dollars. When we talk about this in the Throne Speech, that's what we mean and that's the direction we're going to go.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, what I don't hear . . . What I hear in that then is that basically the health care system is going to review the health care system. And I don't understand how we're going to achieve any of the, what I think we — for a while in this discussion — thought were mutually agreeable goals, if that's the case.

I also respectfully disagree that before that kind of work is done, you should be rationalizing the system even more than what you have done already as the Government of Saskatchewan.

I want to get to a couple of other . . . more health care ideas for the Premier, issues that we've talked about. I'll be talking as well in terms of the Throne Speech perhaps when we come back, about some other issues in the Throne Speech that I want to explore a little bit that I thought I welcomed their inclusion in the Throne Speech.

There was a reference to uranium development, clean coal technology, FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder). And we'll get to some of that.

Two specific proposals on health care now though, Mr. Premier, I'd like to suggest. And we have made them during the session.

You know, what's frustrating I guess is that when opposition ask questions in the Legislative Assembly, certainly there are going to be more questions than there are, from this side of the House, than there are answers. That's the sort of the nature of question period. We didn't win the election and the government won and so we're going to ask questions and hopefully we get answers. But of course, we also provide them as well.

In particular with respect to the out-of-province review committee, we have — and not knowing the ins and outs of the committee — we don't certainly know all of the nuances, all of the details. But what we are familiar with in a very real way, on this side of the House, is the output of this committee, what we have seen come out of this committee in terms of anecdotal cases that frankly seem to be too great to just be anomalies.

And we've just been through a case where this was demonstrated. Clearly I don't think it worked very well on behalf of a family. Doctors truly didn't seem to know, understand how the system worked. They didn't seem to know that they should be taking up the fight for patients and patients didn't know if they should be . . . or families of patients didn't know if they should be fighting the government or taking the matter up with the government. So clearly, there are problems.

So I ask the Premier again the question we've asked the Minister of Health a number of times, will he agree, will he commit to reviewing that out-of-province referral system to ensure that the health care community understands how it works and that that information can be communicated to patients who need it? That's number one.

Number two, we've talked about a health care commissioner in our health care plan for the province. There are certain agencies in the province — chief among them, the Canadian Cancer Society — who would narrow the definition of that officer to be basically an ombudsman for cancer patients. Either way, we think there's a lot of merit in pursuing that.

We've also seen case after case come forward in this Legislative Assembly of people who just simply didn't know where to turn. These are people diagnosed with cancer, Mr. Chairman. People who, every day they wait, they must . . . it must just literally be torture because of the nature of cancer.

And so the Cancer Society talks about a cancer ombudsman; we talk about a health care commissioner so on those two issues, Mr. Chairman, I ask the Premier to comment. Will he commit his government to reviewing the out-of-province review system, number one. Number two, will he also commit to a health care commissioner or at the very least a cancer ombudsman to help patients through this situation.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, if I may just say, I see some neighbours and friends of mine have come into the gallery. These are students, I believe, from Princess Alex School. Their MLA I think will want to stand and perhaps give an introduction. And I'm mindful of the clock. Can we break to do the introduction and then perhaps I can give a quick response?

**The Chair:** — There's been request leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**The Chair:** — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

**Hon. Mr. Forbes:** — Well it's a pleasure here to have the kids here from Princess Alex School. There are 30 of them and their teacher with them today is Mrs. Fofonoff. Now I don't see her. Is she there? There's a big clock in the way.

I would have to say, I've actually taught with Mrs. Fofonoff and it's a great privilege to have you folks come and visit the legislature. You'll see the Premier defending our budget and our Throne Speech today.

And welcome, and I ask all members here to give you a great welcome to the House.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

#### General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

#### Subvote (EX01)

**The Chair:** — I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mindful of the hour, let me say in terms of out-of-province referrals and coverage, I recall when I had the opportunity to serve as Minister of Health, it was my view then and it remains my view that those decisions must be made by the medical professionals — must be made by the medical professionals. And I don't believe any member of this House would argue differently. When it comes to the actual referral process, those decisions must be made not by we who are elected but by the medical professionals.

And that said, Mr. Speaker, I asked for and I've received from the Department of Health — given some of the discussions we've had in this legislature over the last several days — I asked for and received from the Department of Health just how many people are referred out of Saskatchewan for treatment.

And last year, April 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004 there was a total of 394 people who received approval for out-of-province treatment . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no, out-of-country . . . no, out-of-province and out-of-country. So the process is working, 394. Three hundred and ninety four, so the process is working for many, many of our citizens.

Now I believe what we learned from the incident, the concern that was raised here in the legislature, is that ongoing review of these process and ongoing review of the communications is essential. So yes, it is our commitment; in fact, that commitment is already underway. Where there is an ongoing

review of this process . . . and if I may say, this review has already resulted, I'm told by the Minister of Health, in a change — no change that the medical professionals should be making the decisions, but a change in the communication of those decisions, so that there can be a communication both to the medical professional who will be working with the patient or the family, and with the individual and the family themselves.

We understand, one, how significant some of the out-of-country treatment, out-of-province treatment can be. We understand it's a significant cost the families in many cases could not bear by themselves. Therefore we understand the significance to the family; we understand the significance of the treatment. The Minister of Health tells me that, as a result of recent review that in fact the communication policies have changed. And I can have the minister provide the Leader of the Opposition a more definitive statement of the change in the policy.

In terms of whether it be a cancer ombudsperson, or someone who works with cancer patients or other patients, we have put in place across the province a network of what we've described as the quality care coordinators. As we go forward, as we go forward, if they are not sufficient to provide the kind of information that we think patients need, then we will work with our health regions, we'd work with the cancer foundation to look at other options.

I will not be definitive today without I think more conversation with both — whether it be the cancer foundation or with our health regions. My commitment is that we will continue to ongoingly review both health care practices, processes, and in many cases it's an ongoing review of simple communications.

**The Chair:** — It being past 5 p.m., the committee stands recessed until 7 p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.



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