



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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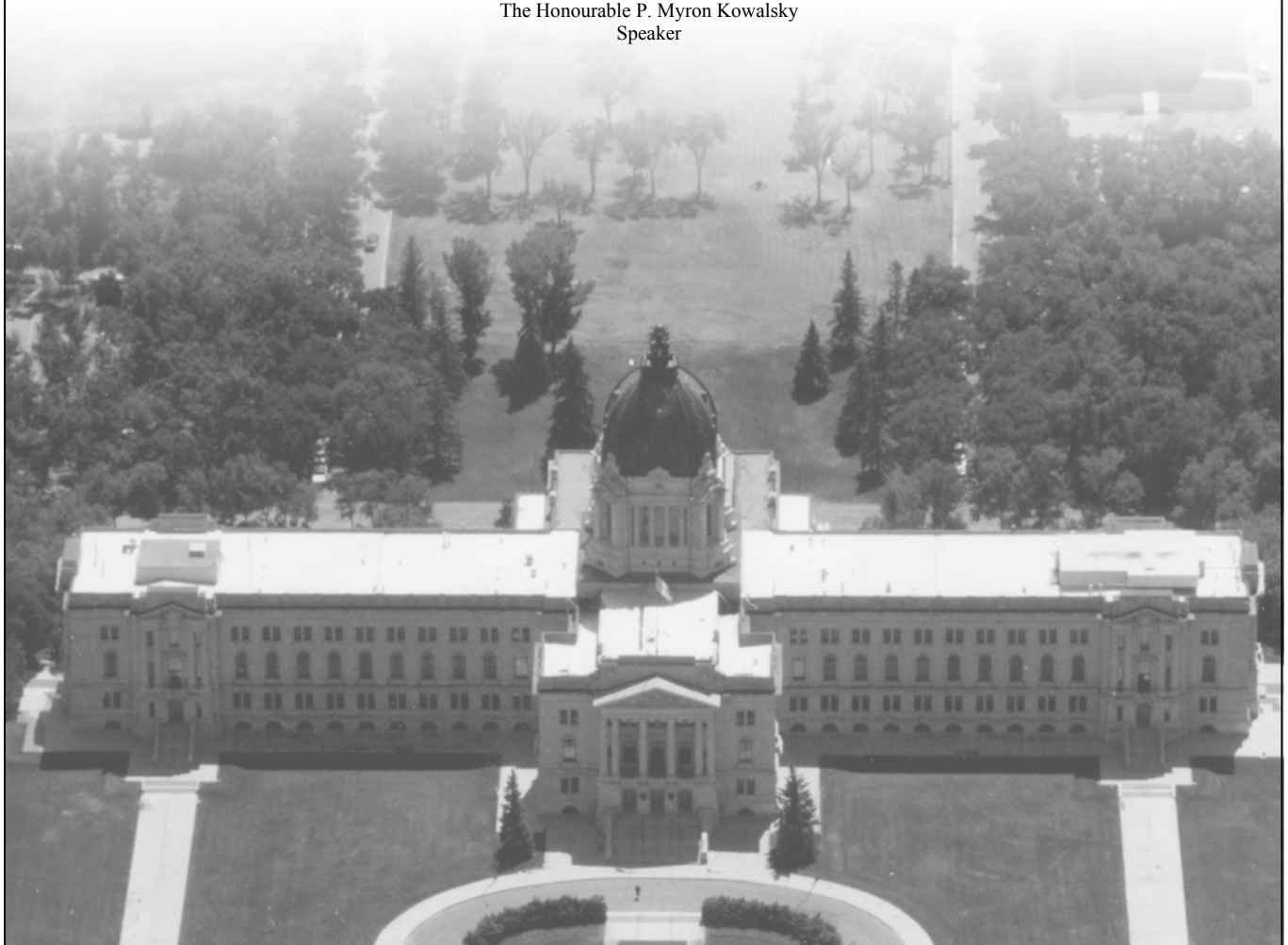
**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(HANSARD)

Published under the  
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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
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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

EVENING SITTING  
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund  
Executive Council  
Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

**The Chair:** — Order. The committee will come to order. First continue with Executive Council, administration (EX01). I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. At the break we were talking about a couple of health care issues. One was the out-of-province review, and the Premier indicated that his minister is indeed reviewing the program. And we look forward to the results of that because we really do believe that there is some improvements that are needed with respect to the out-of-province review program, especially in terms of communicating with health care providers in the province, so they understand the processes that are at work.

And he also touched on how he believes the quality care coordinators are the answer to this issue we have. When we're proposing a health care commissioner or, as the cancer society has proposed, an ombudsman, and again I guess we're a little bit reticent about that because these quality care coordinators, that system has been in place now for some time and has resulted in the very difficulties and challenges that we've been bringing forward here to the Legislative Assembly.

But I would say this, that it does seem to be a sense amongst the government benches that these are issues that need to be dealt with, and we'll continue to ask questions and try to highlight the need for improvements in those areas. So the bottom line of course is so people can get the health care that they deserve in the province and that the information is readily available.

There were some other items in the Premier's Throne Speech, the Premier's government's Throne Speech from this session that I also was encouraged by. There was a reference to continued programming in FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder). I would want to be on the record joining my colleague, the member for Kelvington-Wadena, who has done a lot of work on this issue. I'd want to be on the record as saying the need in the province really is, among other things, in terms of diagnostics for FASD . . . and we've highlighted again cases where this has been prevalent. And so, notwithstanding the reference to FASD in the Throne Speech, those are the things that we will be looking for, although we were glad that it would rate mention in the Throne Speech and hope that it continues to be a priority with specific reference to diagnostics.

Also referenced in the Throne Speech was the uranium industry, and the Premier was touching on it in an earlier answer, that soon we would be hearing more about an expansion of a uranium . . . I'm guessing the expansion of uranium mining in the province of Saskatchewan.

I guess what I want to gather from the Premier . . . and the

Premier also referenced earlier on that I've been going around the province talking about our economic vision for Saskatchewan, referencing the fact that Saskatchewan can and really should be a centre for excellence for all manner of energy generation on the continent. I would ask this of the Premier though, in addition to mining . . . and I understand that this is probably the announcement that's forthcoming, an expansion in the extraction of the mineral, or of uranium I should say. I would ask this: what is the Premier's position on further development of that industry in Saskatchewan? I'm thinking of refining.

Members of this House will know that we have unfortunately — not without the help of a current MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) that's sitting here today — chased away some economic development that would have resulted in the Warman area that involved further refining the ore. You know, Mr. Chairman, I think everybody in Saskatchewan understands that one of the challenges we faced in the province over the last six decades and longer is that we seem to be satisfied to export the raw resource and don't necessarily put a premium on refining or value-added. I think this is especially true on the issue of uranium ore, and the evidence of course is the fact that the NDP (New Democratic Party) partisans have chased out our only opportunity for a refinery.

I want to get the Premier, if he would, on the record. What is his opinion? What are his views, not only in terms of the expansion of uranium extraction in Saskatchewan and mining, but also in the further development of all of the various cycles of this powerful and potentially very positive industry for our province.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I think as all members know, the mining of uranium and the export of uranium is a very significant activity in our province, providing very significant economic benefits to the whole province, but particularly to our northerners. We as a government are very proud of the work that we've been able to accomplish with the industry in the employment of northerners in that industry. We've taken the levels of northern employment there from relatively modest numbers to very substantial numbers. We're very proud of that and proud of the work that the industry has done.

In Saskatchewan, as we've mined uranium, we've done so with every consideration being given to environmental stewardship and safe practices within the mining of uranium. And as we move towards the potential development of Cigar Lake, of course that will be done with all appropriate environmental health and safety scrutiny.

The Leader of the Opposition asks the question about further potential for the refining of uranium in this province and references back to a decision that was made in the late 1970s or early '80s. I would remind the Leader of the Opposition, if he's not aware of this, that the mining industry — whether it be refining and so on, uranium industry — is federally regulated. It was a federal process that, at the end of the day, did not approve the refining of uranium in Saskatchewan.

Now that said, Mr. Chair, we recognize the reality of the state of the industry in Canada today. And when we are in

conversations with the mining industry, with the uranium industry and the players in that industry which we are regularly, they tell us that the refining capacity in this nation is fully met with the refining capacity that exists today in Ontario. And the industry itself is not pushing for further refining capacity. This is clearly not something I think that the Leader of the Opposition would suggest that the Government of Saskatchewan initiate or do. And when the industry itself is saying that they have sufficient refining capacity, the likelihood of expanding that capacity here in the province is very, very thin.

And again to remind the Leader of the Opposition that when the decision was made back in the late '70s or early '80s, that was a federal government decision.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well you know, Mr. Chairman, I think it's also fair to say that . . . and if you talk to those who are in the uranium business here today, and one of the them of course the largest one on the planet, a former Crown corporation or at least a former . . . the product now of a joint venture and then the IPO (initial public offering) or a privatization of two former Crowns, Eldorado Nuclear, the federal Crown, and SMDC (Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation) a provincially owned Crown set up by the Premier's party . . . will know that there is a sense that as a result of what happened in the late '70s and early '80s . . . And the member for Greystone I think would probably agree with this were he given the permission to. The refinery, the proposed refinery at Warman certainly did not feel welcome in the province of Saskatchewan as a result of the work that was done by NDP activists. And I would argue the Government of Saskatchewan . . . and there is a reason that that refinery, that that capacity is in Ontario and not here.

And I think it's unfortunate. This is a home to a third of the world's supply of uranium right here in the province of Saskatchewan. There must be a reason that none of it, not any ore at all is refined here in the province.

And I don't think you can blame federal regulation for that. The environment and the atmosphere here in Saskatchewan certainly has something to do with that. And the Premier talks about how there's no need for further refining capacity now in Canada. You know these things of course change.

Oil wasn't over 40 bucks a barrel a number of months ago either. And oil and gas companies headquartered in Alberta or even here in the province certainly have changed their own development and exploration plans because of the price.

Things change and the question to the Premier is simple. Notwithstanding whether currently, immediately today is a demand for refining or not, would his government support and work with any company that was interested in refining, further refining this resource in the province of Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, again if the Leader of the Opposition wants to review history from the 1970s about the mining or the refining of uranium in this province, he will know — and the record is very clear — that the provincial government at that time, led by then premier, Allan Blakeney, was very much a proponent, very much a

proponent; very much a proponent of the mining industry.

Now the fact of the matter is, the community itself, the community of Warman, the community of Saskatoon, the community of Saskatchewan, many members of the community opposed it. Some were New Democrats; there's no doubt about that. But I expect that some were members of other political parties, including the Conservative Party or the Alliance, Reform, Saskatchewan Party. Citizens of the province expressed their views. I think that's an appropriate, that's an appropriate thing.

Now if in fact circumstances change in the industry or in the world demand or so on, it would be the industry who would step forward to indicate that. As with any proposal made by industry, there are the processes and the regulations, the proper environmental concerns, and so on. Those processes are in place, and if the industry believes there is a potential for the further refining of uranium and the industry steps forward and says that, of course they would be given the due consideration.

My conversations lately and the conversations that this government has had with the industry would indicate there is no, at this time, demand for any further refining capacity.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well I am not sure; I don't know what to read from the Premier's answer.

I mean he . . . you know, understandably this is a hypothetical question; I understand that. And the Premier's answer was based on hypotheticals as well, fair enough. But he's saying that . . . but then he said if the industry stepped forward and the industry wanted to make the investment and if the industry met all of the standards. Now I am putting words in his mouth. If this is wrong he can certainly answer, clarify for the record. But I am assuming what he said was, if the industry met all of the standards, that he would give it, the government would give it due consideration.

I think it's a yes or no question. If all of that happened — if there is an upswing in demand, there's an increased demand for refining of the ore, and if they meet all the standards and it's private sector money, yes or no? Would the Premier support that development in the province of Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the difference. Mr. Chair, here is the difference.

The Leader of the Opposition would have me stand in the House tonight and give some blanket approval to a process of a hypothetical notion that there's going to be some further demand for refining. I'll repeat. The industry believes that the marketplace, the world marketplace requires greater refining capacity. The industry would make that known. The industry would make some decisions about where they believe that refining capacity was most appropriately placed. And the variety of processes exists, some very stringent processes, and fair enough. Which process would, again, I expect, engage some community involvement. It happened in the '70s; the government at that time was a proponent of the industry proposal.

But we're not here, I think, to speculate in hypothetical

situations down the road. What I think is more important is to be discussing those issues which are not speculation but very, very real — very, very real. We have a vibrant mining community and mining economy in this province.

I want to just share with members present a number of quotes from the mining industry itself, from the: “The Saskatchewan NDP government has been a long and ardent supporter of the mining sector and industry in general.”

Quote from an article entitled, “Saskatchewan Mining Moves to the Front Burner,” again from the *Canadian Miner*: “The Saskatchewan government has put a good basket of incentives together that reflect the realities in the industry,” referring specifically to the potash industry.

A quote again from autumn 2003 from the *Canadian Miner*:

When ministry officials in Saskatchewan were comparing the incentives offered by the province with other jurisdictions in Canada, they made an interesting discovery. When you add up all the items in the incentive shopping cart, Saskatchewan is not only competitive. It is one of the most attractive provinces to explore and operate mines.

Mr. Chair, this government, its Department of Industry and Resources, its current minister has worked very diligently with the mining industry to see progress in that industry, to see Saskatchewan take its rightful place as one of the leading mining jurisdictions in Canada, whether it be in uranium or coal or potash. And with our great potential in diamonds, with the other precious minerals, this province is very much a mining province, and we intend to keep it that way, and in fact see progress.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Well what you didn’t hear in any of that, Mr. Chairman, what you didn’t hear in any of that was the Premier just standing up and saying, look, if the private sector wants to make an investment, if they think the demand is there, and if they meet all the environmental regulations and standards set forth by the government to do it, that we would say yes. I didn’t hear him say that.

He didn’t say it, Mr. Chairman. His ideology, I don’t think, would let him say it.

(19:15)

In fact, you know it’s interesting. We have heard from uranium mining executives in this province, a great deal of concern about that Premier’s comments and that Premier’s reference to nuclear energy — which of course is a major source for our uranium, whether we like to admit it or not — that this was the dirtiest form of energy, the dirtiest form of energy.

Imagine how that resonated in the head offices around the world, head offices that may want to invest still more money in our province. Companies that may want to invest in Saskatchewan would hear the Premier of the province say that. And then today or at some point in the future, they’ll read into

the record that even if there’s a market for refining . . . And you know, I guess the Premier wonders about what relevance that has here.

It has everything to do with the future of Saskatchewan, of course; not just with respect to mining uranium but with respect to coal and with respect to oil and gas. It has everything to do with this government’s view of those industries and with this government’s commitment to — with this government’s commitment to the future development of those industries.

It apparently wants to cherry-pick. Yes to this, but no to uranium. And the Premier should just stand up and say yes or no to the answer: if all of those conditions are met, what signal will he send? And he may want to take to his feet, Mr. Chair, and clarify for those that will read these words in the future or perhaps are watching the proceedings, exactly what he meant when he referred to nuclear energy as the dirtiest energy.

Here in the province of Saskatchewan, our Premier, the Premier of the province that is home to a third of the world’s, a third of the world’s uranium supply, would say that — this same Premier whose economy, whose budget is dependent on those very same sources of energy to purchase, to purchase refined uranium that comes from a province, that comes from the province of Saskatchewan. And he tells the world and tells those located here, head office here, present here, that he considers it dirty energy. He may want to clarify that for them.

We in the Saskatchewan Party think there’s great potential with this industry, frankly. And the Premier’s always wanting to know what we would do. Well for instance, Mr. Chairman, we would send a positive signal to this industry, to the people that mine the ore in the province — that employ many, many hundreds and thousands of people in northern Saskatchewan and all over the province — we would send a message to them that, for example, if there was a demand for excess refining capacity, and if there was a private sector company willing to invest, and they met the standards, we wouldn’t even hesitate. The answer would be yes. We want to add that value here in the province of Saskatchewan.

There was another reference as well, I believe, in the Premier’s Throne Speech which I welcome as well; to clean coal, to coal gasification, a clean-coal technology. And again, you know, depending on who you talk to, we could have up to 200 years worth of coal resource here in the province. And I guess we would ask the Premier this question: what specifically is he, what specifically he’s got planned in this regard. Again we would want to be there in support of any project in terms of coal gasification or clean-coal technology in Saskatchewan.

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

**Ms. Morin:** — With leave to introduce guests.

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

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That’s carried. I recognize the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

## INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Ms. Morin:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce two members in the Speaker's gallery, Jackie Shanks and her brother, Ricky Shanks. They are two young constituents of Regina Walsh Acres.

They have many, many talents besides the wonderful sports that they are involved in and very adept at. They are excellent at driving to Saskatoon to pick up signs when they are late during an election. They are very good at accompanying me in door knocking, very good at pushing out a half ton truck when it got stuck in the snow, etc., etc. So I understand they're studying very hard for their exams right now — they're in high school — and I wish them the best of luck, and welcome them to the legislature.

**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. Well again you have a circumstance where you can believe the Leader of the Opposition, who would try and paint the picture of a province that is very inhospitable or unwelcoming to the mining industry, when the facts are just the opposite. And the facts are recognized, not just by this government, not just by the people of Saskatchewan, but those who are most well acquainted with the industry, representatives of the industry themselves in their own publications.

Perhaps I need to quote again to the Leader of the Opposition, what he just recognized, the truth of these words, the truth of these words. Here, another quote from the *Canadian Miner* magazine, talking about Saskatchewan:

The province is also competitive internationally. When you take . . . account (of) the fuel tax credit for mining and exploration, Saskatchewan is in the same league with Venezuela, one of the most attractive countries in the world for mining and exploration. Another advantage the province has to offer comes from an unexpected quarter, (no) health care premiums.

Now isn't that interesting. Now, Mr. Speaker, I could read quote after quote after quote, not from partisan politicians, but from the mining industry itself. From the *Canadian Miner* talking about the potential of diamond mining in this province, quote: "The Saskatchewan government is pro-industry . . ." Mr. Chair, they have all the rhetoric, we have all the action, and the action is providing . . .

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — . . . a burgeoning industry in our

province.

Now when we want to talk about energy sources that come from beneath the ground, coal remains a significant resource. It remains a significant resource today in our capacity to generate electricity, and we believe, as technologies improve, it can be and will be a valuable energy resource for many, many years into the future. The Leader of the Opposition talks about a 200-year supply of coal. I've heard estimates of 3 and 400 years. We have a valuable resource.

Our Power Corporation, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, is very much a part of the clean coal coalition, those who are working at the technologies, it may be gasification, it may be cleaner technologies in the burning of coal. Members will know, citizens will know that the Power Corporation has invested significant dollars in cleaner burning technologies in our existing coal-fired electrical plants.

That said and that resource recognized, we've also recognized other resources, energy resources that come from above the ground. And we have taken over the last three years some extremely significant steps forward in harnessing the power of the wind; a clean technology, a technology where three years ago we were not generating 1 kilowatt hour from the wind. We've done the pilot work with a 15-kilowatt project and now we're moving into a 150-kilowatt project, Mr. Chair, a very, very, very significant expansion of wind-generated electricity in this province.

Now we've also looked at the other opportunities for generation, whether they be solar. We have our Research Council doing some exceptional pioneering work on the globe in terms of the utilization of hydrogen as an energy source. We do see for this province a future that has very much a future with energy as we talked about in the Throne Speech, utilizing those resources which come from beneath the ground, the traditional resources of oil, gas, uranium, coal, the mining sector, but also looking at these new sources which come, many of them, from above the ground. And, Mr. Chair, this province will be, will be a leader in energy.

**Mr. Wall:** — You know, Mr. Chairman, you know you ask for . . . here the opposition is saying that this reference in the Throne Speech is a positive thing, and what are the specifics around it. Is it just a sentence in the Throne Speech or is there something that SaskPower is doing, something specific that the government is doing other than the involvement in the clean coal coalition which, you know, I certainly have heard testimony of in the Crown Corporations Committee.

You know, there is potential, we know, of a pilot project on coal gasification. What's the government specifically doing on that? Are they working with the federal government? These are the kinds of questions that we have for the Premier and the specifics that we're looking for and hope that he has. Or are they only references in the Throne Speech? And I guess I'd ask him to provide those then, if not today, at his earliest convenience to the opposition so we can determine our support for that kind of, that kind of initiative.

It's interesting the Premier would want to quote a number of sources on the issue of mining. It was about three weeks ago or

so that I had the good fortune to meet with a certain mining sector in Saskatchewan, and they did highlight the fact that there continues to be great potential in this province, and they highlighted a certain degree of pride in the investment and the operations they currently have here in Saskatchewan.

But do you know what they said, Mr. Chair? They said that the incremental tax rates in the province results in the fact that we in Saskatchewan, we leave a lot on the table. And of course there's a number of things that will go into the incremental tax rate.

What the industry was saying is that there's significant capacity that goes untapped in Saskatchewan today because of these incremental rates. And specifically, Mr. Chairman, the incremental tax rates would be made up of any number of things depending on the industry. There could be the resource surcharge, there could be the corporate income tax, the capital tax, yes, that the Premier kind of mocks that anybody would want to reduce a tax that actually penalizes investment — but they highlight that fact, Mr. Chairman.

And you know what else they said? They said that when they go to their boardrooms to advocate for more investment in the province of Saskatchewan, the challenge that they have, the challenge that they have is that the incremental tax rates here in Saskatchewan are higher than they are in, say, New Brunswick. They've also got . . . this one company also has an operation in New Brunswick and the incremental tax rate . . .

**The Chair:** — Order, order. Order. Hon. members, order. I would like to be able to hear the member who has the floor. Would the members please come to order. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. They're very frustrated by the fact that these incremental rates here, to expand capacity, actually are more punitive and higher here in Saskatchewan, where there is a head office, for example, for one of them, than they are in New Brunswick or in Florida or near the Dead Sea.

And of course what we lose when we don't, when we're not competitive on this front is we don't lose just the incremental revenue, if we were to lower those incremental rates and generate that revenue for the General Revenue Fund. We don't just lose the revenue. We lose the economic activity and the jobs and we face the prospect of these companies having to take their additional investment dollars elsewhere.

So there is much work to be done. There is work to be done, and I think that's precisely the point. We're going to get to it a little bit later on this evening. Precisely the point is the government does seem to be quite happy with things the way they are. The Premier seems quite happy with the fact that a province with all of the riches we have to offer, all of our natural endowment and our human resource, is a have-not province. He seems to be happy with that.

And we're going to get to that in a moment, I think, Mr. Chairman. But I would ask for some specifics from the Premier on the coal gasification project. Surely if he would include this in the Throne Speech there must be something that is backing

those things up, and we would ask for specifics on that tonight here, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well it is somewhat confusing when the Leader of the Opposition seems afraid to identify the industry which he speaks. I'll identify the industry — it's the potash industry. Just days ago I sat down with the leaders of the potash industry in this province. I'm not afraid to admit it. I'm not afraid to say it. I don't know why the Leader of the Opposition is.

Now the facts are these, Mr. Chair. There are two mineral resources in which Canada — Canada — leads in the world. They're both based in Saskatchewan. One of them's uranium and one of them's potash. We lead the world.

We are today seeing record numbers in terms of potash production. We're seeing a very good price for potash on the international markets — very good. We have seen expansion of that industry. About a year ago we made some change to the regime regarding investments in the potash industry. The industry has taken advantage of those changes. We see the expansion that's happening in Rocanville, Saskatchewan right now.

We also are aware, Mr. Chair, of the difference in royalty and taxation regimes around the world. The industry tells me as well that when their boardrooms are making capital decisions, of course they look at that as one of the factors. But they also look at the factor of the ready access to the potash which is here, they look at the infrastructure which is here, they look at the quality of the potash which is here, and they look at the skill of the Saskatchewan workforce that's mining the potash.

To deal with the matter of the taxation regime, the potash industry themselves understand and will say to me, we understand your need for revenues to provide for health care, to provide for education, infrastructure, highways, and so on. We understand your need and we understand the investment needs of the industry.

Therefore again not just rhetoric but action, we are working with the industry. We are working with the industry today and in the days ahead to review the entire package to ensure that the people of Saskatchewan get their fair share of return for the resource which belongs to them, and equally makes it possible for the industry to prosper and to invest, to employ our people, and to keep us in a leadership position in the world.

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

(19:30)

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

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker . . . or, Mr. Deputy Chair, sorry . . . Mr. Chair. I would like to ask a few questions of the Premier this evening.

Mr. Premier, we've been talking recently, several members of our caucus, about the whole issue around addictions and about specifically crystal meth. And so this evening I'd like to ask

you, with a bit of preamble, what your plan is to address this serious concern?

Mr. Premier, in the United States they formed an 89 member, bipartisan congressional caucus to fight and control methamphetamine. And I'd like to quote from a letter that was written some two years . . . on October 2002 regarding this serious concern in the United States at that time. And I quote, and they're writing to the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. And the caucus bipartisan group writes, and I quote:

We ask that, when crafting future drug policy, a greater focus is placed on the drug methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is quickly becoming one of the most dangerous drugs in the United States. Production nationwide continues to skyrocket. This statistic should cause great concern as it shows it highly addictive. Methamphetamine has become a mainstream drug.

And then it goes on to talk about how it, “. . . permeates into virtually every aspect of life, it is not only the person that is directly using it.” But it goes on to say that:

Families and communities are also torn apart due to this illicit drug. Meth use often leads to other crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse, and theft. In addition, meth has dangerous impacts on environment.

Methamphetamine production leaves behind 5 to 6 pounds of toxic waste per pound of meth produced. Meth lab investigations require special health and haz mat procedures and specifically trained investigative personnel to collect and handle evidence seized.

In crafting the drug policy, the legislators from the United States ask that specifically these points were addressed: law enforcement, environment, child welfare, treatment and prevention.

And, Mr. Premier, specifically they talked about prevention. They asked that the United States government devote specific accounts to meth prevention education, rather than a more broad drug prevention education. And it secondly encourages states to integrate meth education for both students and parents into anti-drug education class.

And, Mr. Premier, this goes directly to what the Saskatchewan Party has been calling on the government to address, that there be specific education component in the curriculum by this fall directly related to meth and also that there be education broadly spread across the province in the form of, hopefully, public meetings for students and parents with law enforcement involved, with those that work in addiction services involved.

Would the Premier please address this and tell the legislature what steps the Premier's going to take to be proactive in the fight to stop people, and especially our young people, in becoming involved with this deadly drug? Will he hold public education meetings? Will he ensure that the curriculum specifically addresses this issue this fall? And will he entertain the idea of a special joint committee of the legislature to look at further avenues we can take to address this serious issue?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, the members, members opposite have identified in the course of this sitting a particular concern around crystal meth — a concern that is shared by this government, a concern that I'm sure is shared by the people of Saskatchewan, a concern that is shared by all of us I think who are parents or work with or have involvement with young people.

Now the facts again are that as early as 1998 it was the current Minister of Health, then in his capacity as attorney general, who brought together attorneys general from a variety of provinces and began discussions about this very specific drug problem. We have now incorporated into our educational curriculum — the Minister of Learning tells me beginning as early as grade 4 — education to our young people around the use of drugs.

Now we understand and the opposition understands and I think most in Saskatchewan understand the particular, the particular addictive qualities of this drug. But I think it's fair to say that there are many other substances that our young people are exposed to that can create as much havoc in their lives or in the lives of their families as crystal meth.

I represent a constituency where there is a significant amount of sniffing of other substances, creating some very, very difficult circumstances. We all will know families in communities, in neighbourhoods where alcohol remains the drug of choice. We all know that there are a variety of substances that affect our young people.

Yes, we need to provide information about this drug. But we equally need to be providing information about all of those substances which affect our kids particularly — if I may say — which affect any citizen of our province.

Now we're taking some very, very direct steps to try and get at some of this during this session. One of the pieces of legislation that's been under debate in this session is the safe communities Act where, through the passage of this piece of legislation, we will put into the hands of our enforcement agencies, the police, the ability to move in and shut down some of these homes where these drugs are being produced right in our neighbourhoods. The police forces are very appreciative of this tool that this legislature will provide for them to deal with those who are profiting from the production of this kind of substance in our neighbourhoods.

The Minister of Learning has committed to continuing the work of education through the school curriculum, but has committed also that we're not simply going to put all of our efforts into one, because our young people are faced with a barrage of drugs and unhealthy lifestyle opportunities and temptations.

And if I may say, Mr. Chair, it seems to me we need always to be asking the question: what is it that turns a young person to look for a substance to alter their experience? What is it? What's going on? And there are some deep-rooted causes here.

And yes, we must treat the criminals that are providing it. And yes, we must treat and help those who are currently or are tempted to use the substance. But we've got to look a little deeper, in my view, Mr. Chair, to what is it that motivates a young person. What is it in their peer pressure? What is it in



their experience?

And I have concluded, Mr. Chair, that the work that we're doing to try and lift people out of poverty, out of dependence, to lift people into employment and education, the work that we're doing in housing to stabilize neighbourhoods and provide families with quality housing, these are just as important in the long run.

Ah, the Leader of the Opposition may smile. But these, in my view, are as important, as important as the urgent work that needs to be done when a young person is facing the choice of the unhealthy lifestyle.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier. And I appreciate the fact that your government is going to take this issue very seriously.

One of the other points that were made by the US (United States) congressman was the whole issue of treatment. And under the heading treatment, they make the following points, that they make funds available specifically for meth addicts because meth has its separate and unique characteristics.

And, Mr. Premier, it is well known in the province of Saskatchewan amongst addiction workers and law enforcement agents and those that are seeking treatment for addiction that we have a great lack of facilities that are directly related to supporting our youth and to helping them with addictions. At one time in the province, we had a separate facility for youth — White Spruce — which was closed by your government. And I'm asking you, Mr. Premier, what specific steps are you taking as a government in order to address this serious lack of facilities, both for detox and for in-patient treatment?

I've had occasion in the last month to speak with several addiction counsellors that indicate that there are no facilities available for detoxing young people. The only avenue is to send them to an emergency ward in the hospital. Many young people unfortunately end up under law enforcement because of a lack of facilities for them to go to, to detox, and to be helped from the point of . . . (inaudible) . . . to detoxification. And then once that happens, there is yet a lack of resources where they can go for ongoing treatment so that they can actually kick the habit, and also for their families to be involved because this is a family issue, not just the person who is directly addicted.

Could the Premier indicate what steps you are taking as a government to address this problem?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I would not want the member to leave any erroneous impression on those who may be observing the proceedings tonight. My view is there is room for debate on whether or not we are providing sufficient resources for either detox or rehabilitation resources that are in-patient. There is room for debate there.

But I would not want anyone to be left with the impression there are not services available today for young people in Saskatchewan for both detox and rehab work. In fact for detox and rehab there is a very exceptional program that's provided at the Calder Centre in Saskatoon, the Calder Centre adolescent program.

There, there are 12 beds devoted to the in-patient treatment of youth. And of those 12 beds, 9 are geared toward services for chemically dependent youth that may be referred from addiction services across the province, and there's a very highly qualified multidisciplinary staff at Calder. I've been there many times.

In terms of more southern, there are detoxification facilities available here in the southern part of the province, at the Angus Campbell Centre in Moose Jaw and at the Regina, at the Regina detox. Mr. Chair, you will recall, others will recall there was a treatment facility at White Spruce in Yorkton, a 45-bed facility that at its maximum, at its maximum only achieved about a 15-bed utilization — at its maximum.

What we have done over the last number of years is to try and bring the services closer to the family and closer to the young people. And so there are many, many more community-based services today in Saskatchewan than were just a few years ago. And I think the literature would say and the professionals would say that oftentimes the community-based service, where you can work with young people in their own community as opposed to removing them from their community, can be the most effective treatment.

Now I agree that there is yet room for debate, yet room for discussion. Should we be looking at further in-patient treatment for youth? I think it's a good question.

Members will know that we are working on a facility in Saskatoon for detox for adults. That work is underway, but again I think we have to be more sensitive to sometimes where the problems exist. And often the problems are existing in community, and the more services that we can bring to the family and the child, the neighbourhood, in community, I think we're going to be more effective.

So, fair enough? I think we could debate further the need for further in-patient treatment, but I do not want anyone to be left with the impression that there are not programs and facilities available tonight if a young person needs that kind of help.

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

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier. I believe that if you speak with people across the province that work in addiction services and families who have tried to find help for the young people, you would find quite a different response from them, that there is not a timely access to addiction services.

When people are crying out for help and when they've made the decision that they want help, they need it now because the time frame, if you talk to addiction counsellors, is often very short when they make that determination. And if you lose them during that time, the chances of getting them back and wanting that help are very slim. And so it is very, very important that we have access to timely services in the province.

It's also true that under 12 years of age there is no place for detox. I spoke directly with an addiction counsellor that works with young people, that helps them after that age, but when they're under 12 years of age the only place they can send them is to an emergency ward in the hospital, Mr. Premier.

(19:45)

And I also heard you speak about community-based organizations. And as anyone that deals with addictions in this province knows, that since 1993, I believe it was, when SADAC (Saskatchewan Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission) was dismantled in this province, we have seen a continual decline in the services that are provided by community-based organizations because of the government putting these services under the auspices of regional health authorities. And there's an ongoing struggle between the local health authorities and the government: the government saying they're not responsible to make these decisions about what services are provided and the health region saying that the government is holding the purse strings so they don't have any control over it.

We have seen several areas where funding has been cut in the last budget to addiction services in the province. And so for the Premier to say that we have adequate services and that the issue of youth and where there's facilities is adequate is, I believe, not a true statement in regard to that we do have a timely access. And it's certainly something that needs to be addressed.

And I would ask the Premier, I would ask him if he would be willing to meet with the Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Addictions that have had this concern ever since SADAC was dismantled, and speak to them and work with them in trying to address the seriousness of the lack of services and the lack of community involvement and the lack of input from people that have walked the walk and know what we need to have in order to address addiction services adequately in the province.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I wish the member opposite and members opposite generally, when they want to make . . . reflect comments that are made on this side of the House, would reflect them accurately.

I did not say at any point in my comments that I believe that all the services available today are adequate. In fact I think I indicated just the opposite; there is room for discussion and debate here.

Now I spent some fair bit of time serving both as associate and then as minister of Health. And I spent a fair bit of time speaking with people in the field of addictions and young people. And there is a debate in the professional community about the most appropriate and effective services, whether they should be community-based or institutional-based.

I don't particularly have the expertise to settle that debate, but I can tell you for sure there is a debate in the community. Would I be willing to meet with the folks in the addictions communities? Yes. In fact, had circumstances been different, this past week I was planning to meet with members of that community. A family death prevented me from attending to that meeting. Absolutely.

This is not a matter that we, I think, we should engage in a high level of partisan finger pointing or anything else. We all are searching for the right solutions. There is a debate, I know in the treatment community, about what those right solutions are.

We did have a stand-alone, drug-alcohol commission

throughout the 1980s into the early '90s that was brought into the more general delivery of health because at the time it was suggested that that would in fact provide more effective treatment. We have had the experience of those years, and again there is a debate whether that is in fact the appropriate way to go.

Now I think we also need to recognize that there are limits to what we can provide to individuals. We need the individuals to make some conscious decisions for themselves. We need to be making changes in family support and family structure and neighbourhoods and the kind of influences that get young people and adults into addictive behaviours.

It is, it is not simply a matter of adding more facilities. I mean you just simply turn on any media and see the influences on our kids. Influences that weren't there even, even 10 years ago. You can now, I am told in this legislature, find sites on the Internet that give all sorts information. That kind of information wasn't available to our young people even, even 10 years ago.

So Mr. Chair, there are so many factors to this. My view is that we need to take it seriously. I see the results in . . . well we all see the results in our own constituencies, sometimes in our own families. The appropriate solutions are not always simple. But I tell you I commit myself and this government to finding the best solutions that we can find for our young people and adults wherever they live in Saskatchewan.

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

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier, and I appreciate your concern for this issue because it is a serious issue, and it is not a partisan issue.

Notwithstanding the outside influences that everyone in society is faced with today, whether it is the Internet or TV or music or whatever, as a government we have an obligation to help those that need help. And as we know from talking to those that work in drug squads, that 80 per cent of the crime — in their estimation — in Saskatchewan is directly related to addictions of one sort or the other. So if we address the serious issue of addictions and we help those that are addicted, then we will reduce the cost to justice. We will also reduce the cost to the health system and to the social services system.

And, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Premier, just a . . . the last question I'd like to ask you with regards to addictions is about the mattress detox or the brief detox — it's called by various names — in Saskatoon, which is adjoined to Larson House. This facility was promised in 2001. It is my understanding that the facility is now built but the indication is that it will not be in operation until September.

I'd like to ask you, Mr. Premier, why this facility is on hold, why it is not being opened as we speak. When the facility is built . . . and is this government committed to the ongoing operating expenses of this facility in the years to come? Or will this become an expense of the Saskatoon Health District whereby if budgets are cut, they will have to make cuts accordingly?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I understand from the

Minister of Health that the member of Weyburn had this, a very similar discussion with the Minister of Health during his estimates.

He indicates to me that the people involved with the detox centre in Saskatoon are today working out the various protocols that I guess would involve health care providers, law enforcement agencies, and so on — that that work does take some time. I think we'd all like to hurry it up, but also we want it done right. And so the prediction is or the prognosis is that it should be completed and the facility opening in September.

And as we open that facility, it will have the ongoing support of the Department of Health through budgeting to the Saskatoon Region. This is not something that we're opening, and then we'll withdraw funding for in some early or future time. We see this as a permanent addition to addictions treatment for the people of Saskatchewan.

And we think it's a good partnership. Lots of good work's been done; I'm told a little more needs to be done. But everyone, I think, anticipates now a September opening.

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

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, to the Premier. Premier, this year's budget contained a number of surprises, one of them being the closure of the Echo Valley Conference Centre in Fort Qu'Appelle. This caught the valley community by surprise, as you can well imagine. They certainly feel that this facility is a historic and important facility in their community, and they have asked to work with your government to see if that facility can be saved from the wrecking ball, Mr. Premier.

When the announcement was made that this facility would close, your minister responsible suggested that the annual savings would be in the neighbourhood of 800 to \$900,000 per year. Yet during the consideration of estimates of the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation, officials from that corporation suggested that the savings would be more in the order of \$500,000 a year.

What the valley community is asking, Mr. Premier, is this. They're saying six months isn't enough time to come up with some viable plans for that historic facility. It's a facility that has about 200 acres. It has probably a dozen buildings. It's a facility that has a long history in this province, and it's a facility that's hugely important to the area.

The valley leaders met with the Minister Responsible for Sask Property Management Corporation in early May and presented the minister with a brief. And I'd like to quote from that brief, Premier. And I quote:

The Valley Community commits itself, to cooperate and work with your department to review the total structure and operation of . . . (the Echo Valley Conference Centre) and, within two years to advance recommendations and policies to return its operation to an acceptable financial footing. If such a review and study does not bring these results, then the Valley Community would no longer object to closure and in fact would assist it.

That seems like a very reasonable position and a very reasonable suggestion. And my question, Premier, is will you consider the valley community's request?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, there are many of us in this province who have a great deal of affection and some very, very good memories about the Echo Valley Conference Centre. Many of us have spent a significant time in that facility — whether it be through government or through community groups, through church groups, through labour groups. And we all understand, I think, the historic significance of the facility in the treatment of tuberculosis.

Now over the last number of years the costs of operation have become virtually prohibitive. They have just risen. I think it is \$1 million a year thereabouts we're losing in terms of the facility. This is the information that we have.

Now in a very difficult budget, when we are trying to find resources for health care and for education, for all the areas that the opposition would have us fund — while we should be also reducing taxes, I'm told — you ask your various departments to look for areas where we believe there can be some monetary savings without significant hurt to the general public.

It has been proposed that we would end our involvement with the Echo Valley Conference Centre. However this does not necessarily mean that a wrecking ball comes in to tear down the facility. I'm told that SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) is very willing to work with proposals, with community groups. I know there's a number of groups that are interested in working with the facility. The local community of Fort Qu'Appelle, members of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour have talked about work that could be done. It has been our assessment that a six-month period is time to start bringing forward some of those proposals. As those proposals come forward, we're not looking for absolutely finished, detailed proposals but some substantive ideas and proposals. Let them come forward. We'll want to work with the community. We'll want to work with various groups to look at proposals and options for that facility and that piece of our history.

But, Mr. Chair, this government's ability to keep funding the facility at a loss of 1 million or whatever it is a year, that is just not a sustainable in the long run. So we encourage . . . we give it a time frame of six months before any closures would take place, to look at proposals, and I'm encouraging those proposals to come forward.

**Mr. Hart:** — Mr. Chair, the Premier talks about \$1 million of annual losses when in fact Mr. Koop from the Sask Property Management Corporation, the individual that's responsible for the operation of that facility, estimates that the annual cost savings by closing down the Echo Valley Conference Centre are more in the neighbourhood, the real savings are more in the neighbourhood of \$550,000, and he stated that in the Crown and Central Agencies Committee on May 12.

Mr. Chair, the Premier mentioned that the losses recently are unmanageable. Well the facts are that that centre has been losing money for a period of 8 to 10 years, that if that facility has been losing money of that magnitude over the last 8 to 10

years, why didn't this government — the Premier and this government — consult with the community some five or six years ago?

In fact, I'd like to quote from a letter from Mr. Don Anderson, executive assistant with the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and I quote. He says, "Why didn't SPMC talk to users in the valley community about this matter two or three or four years ago?"

(20:00)

And that's a very valid question. Why didn't this government talk to the valley community about this facility? It's a historic facility; it's just not another office building that you shut down at the blink of an eye. This government knew that that facility was losing money and yet they didn't even have the decency to talk to the community and the users of that facility, Mr. Chair.

So it's certainly not an excuse that . . . a tough budget and that this was a spur-of-the-moment decision. In fact, SPMC, at their request, they only renewed the contract with the Department of National Defence for the sea cadet program for one year. Prior to that, they always signed a five-year program, and the sea cadets certainly would have signed a five- or ten-year program if they knew that that facility would be in operation.

So, Mr. Chair, this lack of consultation is certainly something that this government doesn't do. We see it in the closure of health facilities. We see it in the closure of conservation offices across this province where they haven't even got the decency to go and talk to the community. They find out the day of the budget at 12 o'clock, Mr. Chair.

And all this community is asking for is, give us a little bit more time; talk to us; give us two years; and if we can't come up with a plan, we'll help you shut the thing down. Will you do that, Mr. Premier?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, for the last number of years we have been making some investments in the Echo Valley Centre with hope that more activity would occur there. The information that I have indicates that the occupancy rate is only about 33 per cent now, that significant capital improvements are required. I'm told here that a capital injection of 4.7 million over the next five years would be required for building upgrades, another million required for some cosmetic upgrades and the addition of 30 private washrooms to bring the facility to a medium-quality standard for facilities of its kind.

And I repeat: decisions are not easy when you're in government. But you don't have the luxury of opposition who will say spend more, spend more, spend more in health; spend more in highways; spend more in education; spend more at the Echo Valley Centre; spend more in the Department of the Environment; spend more everywhere. And at the same time, have the Leader of the Opposition stand up, well you've got to reduce the royalties in the mining sector, and you've got to cut the provincial sales tax, and you've got to lower the income taxes. And it just isn't working with that kind of a theory.

So what we've said — the minister has said it on many occasions — we've extended an interim period here of six

months to look at options. If options are there, we're more than happy to sit down with the community or with the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour) or other interested parties, with the Department of National Defence, to see if there's a workable option.

But it's very difficult, it's very difficult for this government to go to the people of Saskatchewan and say — as they demand, rightfully so, more resources for MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) and CT (computerized tomography) scans, and on and on it goes — that we can simply magically produce those resources without looking at some current expenditures.

We are willing — the minister has said it on many occasions; I've said it publicly — we're willing to look at options that might exist. But I find it very difficult to commit to ongoing funding down the road without any sense that there will be a plan because we can find ourselves two years down the road having spent yet another million or two, and be no further ahead than we are today.

So I think if plans can come forward in a timely fashion, the minister has indicated SPMC is more than willing to sit down and work with communities and groups.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member for Cannington.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, a few weeks ago in the paper there was some writing that you were musing about the possibilities of changing our electoral system, and perhaps going to something along the line of proportional representation.

I wonder if you would care to elaborate a little bit more what you were thinking in that area, and what kind of a time frame you were looking at.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, there's been a significant amount of discussion about proportional representation in Canada. It's the fact of the matter now in most parliamentary democracies outside of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Therefore, I think as legislators we all would give consideration to proportional representation.

I have not proposed any particular move in that direction, but when asked, of course, I'm willing to look at proportional representation as an option. I think we all should be, and could be.

Now it's not all, it's not all one-sided either. There are very solid arguments, I think, that I could make for proportional representation. I think there's some very solid arguments that I could make opposing proportional representation. I'm sure the member from Cannington could make the same arguments on both sides.

So he asks if I have indicated publicly an interest, or a willingness, to discuss this, of course it's being discussed across the country and around the globe.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well thank you, Mr. Premier. Well certainly one of your federal colleagues, Mr. Nystrom, has certainly been promoting the idea of proportional

representation.

There was some interesting commentary on this particular issue in a Randy Burton column over the weekend in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* that I think we should keep in mind that if we . . . when we look at electoral reform, especially if we happen to be looking at proportional representation.

And Mr. Burton talked about the possibility of Paul Martin forming or electing a minority in this particular time and that it wouldn't necessarily be incumbent on him to resign as Prime Minister, but that he could carry on as Prime Minister with the support of perhaps the NDP and perhaps the Bloc Quebecois. And that as long as there was no vote of non-confidence, that he could carry on that way indefinitely.

And David Smith, the political scientist professor at the University of Saskatchewan, had some comments about that particular issue. And I would like to read some of those comments, Mr. Chairman. I would like to quote Dr. Smith:

The only time you could go back to the people immediately is if you had a tie and I don't think that's going to happen because we don't just have two parties . . .

And he's talking about the federal election, the possibility that two political parties could be equally tied and therefore the House would be hung and the necessity in place then to go to an election. He's stating that that would be unlikely to happen because we have more than two political parties. Dr. Smith goes on to say, and I quote:

It's shaping up to be a big constitutional evening. My concern is a lot of people won't understand why this is happening because they don't understand how the constitution works, Smith said.

It may also feed cynicism about our political system and the constitution's role in it, Smith believes.

There are growing calls for a whole range of changes to the way our system works, including fixed election dates, elected judges and proportional representation.

And Randy Burton's column goes on to say:

If for example, Canada did have a system of PR where seats are allocated according to how many votes a party gets, the scenario we're staring at right now would happen much more regularly.

Given the nature of the situation, it's little wonder that Harper is starting to talk about the need for a majority government.

The alternative scenarios are enough to make even a separatist's head hurt.

That's the end of the quotes, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, clearly according to Dr. Smith, that you get into a very difficult situation under proportional representation where no party forms a majority, that there is a great deal of uncertainty in the system and that the Prime Minister, in this case, Mr. Martin,

could retain the position of Prime Minister even though he would not necessarily have the largest party in the House of Commons.

I wonder if you would care to comment on that, Mr. Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I'm not quite sure where the member is going with this conversation. I'm not sure if he's promoting proportional representation as something that government should be pursuing here, or arguing against proportional representation. I think he has the capacity to make a good argument on both sides of that equation.

And yes, we are involved in a federal election where the outcome, if we were operating on a proportional scheme, might have one way and if it — in the traditional way that we vote in Canada today — it may come out differently. I mean, it's an important discussion, it's an important discussion, but it's not something that many citizens, if I may say, are approaching me about.

We are having some debate in this legislature, as you know, by a motion introduced by the former leader of the opposition . . . or a Bill, that would fix election dates. I find it rather interesting that the Bill that's before the House around a fixed election date would fix the election date on the third Monday of October, each and every four years, the third Monday of October. I'm surprised that the Saskatchewan Party particularly would recommend the third Monday of October. Given the for once wet spring that we're having, I think there could be a large number of Saskatchewan people involved in the harvest right through a campaign that would be leading up to the third week of October.

So I'm never just sure where the Saskatchewan Party is coming from on electoral reform. Are we for proportional representation or against proportional representation? Are we for having elections during a harvest period or at the finish of harvest period or opposed to having elections during a potential harvest period? So I would . . . I'd encourage the member to keep up the discussion. I'm interested in what Mr. Burton has to say in *The StarPhoenix* and Dr. Smith. It's an interesting debate, but I say it's not something that my phone is exactly ringing off the hook on.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well thank you, Mr. Premier. I'm glad that you asked what I thought about it because I think what we need to be seriously looking at — if you're going to open up the electoral debate on what kind of electoral system we have — that we should be taking a very serious look at the single transferable vote, otherwise known as the preferential ballot.

And most people in this House are familiar with that. Both of our political parties have run their leadership campaigns utilizing that form of democracy and it works very well, Mr. Speaker.

And so we would be interested in taking a very serious look at that kind of a change, if a change is being proposed by the Prime Minister . . . by, excuse me, the Premier. And we would be interested in discussing that for a possibility of using it in the next provincial election.

If you have any comments on preferential, Mr. Premier, versus proportional?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — A preferential ballot is one technique by which a proportional representation can be achieved. I know there are jurisdictions who have the preferential ballot system. Not a simple system, but it can be workable. It's been demonstrated to be workable.

Again I'm unclear of the position that the member is taking. Are you encouraging government to do this, to move to proportional representation, preferential ballots, or are you suggesting we should think about it? Are you saying we shouldn't do it? I'm unclear of the position being taken tonight by the Saskatchewan Party.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Well thank you, Mr. Premier. I think there is a difference though between proportional and preferential, that one is not somehow a part of the other.

Last couple of times that there has been electoral changes in this province, changes to The Election Act, it's been done in consultation with the opposition in preparing those particular changes. And I understand that there is a process underway at the present time to an all-party committee to take a look at the elections Act. Would the Premier commit to consulting with the opposition prior to even exploring any changes in the voting system that we currently have in place?

I understand that there's a possibility that there's discussions going on at the present time between the NDP and the Liberals as to how proportional would work, and I wonder if the Premier would either confirm or deny that that's happening.

(20:15)

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — I can confirm the following. If the member is speaking about discussions that may be happening between the federal Liberal Party and the federal New Democratic Party, I know nothing of it. It may be.

And to my knowledge, as Leader of the New Democratic Party, I am not engaged with any discussions with the Leader of the Liberal Party or anybody in the Liberal Party about proportional representation here. But I will commit this, if we were to engage in such a discussion, absolutely we would consult with the opposition before launching into any kind of a public discussion.

We'll all have our private discussions. We're all approached by journalists and that's fair enough. But before we would enter into any kind of formal review of the electoral system in the province of Saskatchewan, we would do as we have always done, and that's engage whoever happen to be in opposition at that time.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Premier. A few years ago a change was made in the selection of the Chief Electoral Officer, that it went from being strictly a party appointee to becoming an officer of this legislature. But the returning officers in all of the constituencies continue to be appointed by the political party in power.

There has been, in the last couple elections, some serious deficiencies in some areas relative to that — to the returning officers and to the deputy returning officers, Mr. Premier. And it affects both sides of the House. It affects all the political parties that are running for election.

Have you been considering changing that to appointing a full-time returning officers within the constituency so that they can be trained up properly, so that they can be prepared to hit the ground running when a writ is dropped?

I know that the last time we had a discussion with the Chief Electoral Officer, it was a serious problem for her in preparing for the election in having people that were prepared, who understood how to carry on an election because they're basically volunteers. The names are on the list. They start the training a month before the election is called. They find something else to do, and you don't have the trained people in place any longer.

There needs to be a change made, Mr. Premier, so that we have a system that actually works and works efficiently for everyone, that all of the electors are placed on the electors' ballot, on the enumeration and so that the election is run properly.

Is there some considerations being made to change the electoral Act to allow for full-time returning officers?

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — No, Mr. Chair, at this time we are not looking at any change to appointing paid or full-time returning officers.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, I think tonight I finally found something that I agree with the Premier on. It's took a long time but if I heard his comments right tonight, and remembering that we have free votes on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, and I heard the Premier say that . . . I'm not sure whether he said he likes the thought of having set election dates every four years, but he would question having them in October. And I remember after the fall election last year, Mr. Premier, in November — in fact I think it was 6th, 7th, 8th — digging posts out of the ground. And the only think that made it better, Mr. Premier, was the smile on my face knowing that I'd won Melville-Saltcoats after the boundaries had changed.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Premier, it takes a while, but we finally agree on something, although I don't know if you like fixed election dates.

Mr. Premier, after what we've had happen in this session . . . and I go back to 2003 SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention, 2004 SARM convention, election in November, and the one thing that keeps sticking in my mind . . . and I noticed the other day it kept happening again where rural representatives, reeves, councillors, administrators, started to begin to ask the question: what does the word "status quo is not on" mean?

And I guess tonight, Mr. Premier, I would like you to explain those words because I think I'm missing something in there. They sound quite simple, but something is wrong here. And those people aren't getting the message, and I know members on this side certainly aren't getting what you meant by that because something is not working right. Would you like to explain those remarks, Mr. Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — I understand why the member of Melville-Saltcoats had such a big smile on his face after the November election. Yes, he did win the seat, but I think the smile got on his face when his own party tossed Mr. Schmidt out of the running so that he could win the seat.

Now the member is correct. When I addressed the SARM convention a year and a half ago, I indicated to that convention that this longstanding issue, longstanding issue of the matter of the education portion, the education funding that comes from the property tax base — this longstanding issue — we were taking it on and taking it on in a real way.

Now I've repeated this. I've told this story on a number of occasions just in the last week. When I first sought public office in this province, we debated the matter of the education property tax at that time, which was some 20 years ago. It was there before this. It got worse in the '80s. We tried to deal with it through the '90s by injections of new money into K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) education, \$125 million more to K to 12 education in the last few years. Thirty million dollars more injected to revenue sharing in the last few years has not made a significant impact on the share of the property tax that's going to education.

So I said to the SARM delegates, the status quo is not on; we're going to begin the process of change. And the first change of the status quo was to appoint the Boughen Commission to do the work of the Boughen Commission, to look at the whole funding of education. Now the Boughen Commission reported.

Members opposite one day say we should implement the whole Boughen Commission. The next day they say, well we shouldn't implement it at all because it has this tax provision in it. In fact the member from Melville-Saltcoats said he'd vote right against that even if it meant maintaining the education tax on the property. That was the first step.

We took much from the Boughen Commission. A great deal of work was done in the Boughen Commission, a great deal of public discussion. But the opposition and its leader and its members day after day told, whatever you do, do not tax the restaurant meals. They said that day after day after day. They said day after day after day, do not increase the taxes. So you see, we were instructed by the opposition not to follow the Boughen Commission's recommendations.

We have decided, Mr. Chair, to build a platform where substantive change can be made in the delivery and the governance of education in this province. We've decided to take the very courageous step of a reform of school governance and district governance in this province.

Now the opposition doesn't like it. I understand that. They don't like change. They'd like us to just be back freeze-framed

decades ago, but that's not the way we look at it. We look at a world that's changing, and we're going to change with it. We're going to build a more equitable distribution of educational funding in this province. We're going to build better governance.

Mr. Chair, then as we add these new resources, we can be assured that those resources will in fact begin to make a real shift, a real shift in the funding of education from the property tax base. Now if anyone says that things have not changed in the last two years, they've not been very aware of the undertakings of this government.

Now, Mr. Chair, I conclude my remarks by saying as follows. We didn't get here overnight, and we're not going to solve this problem overnight. And I know the opposition would love us to devote 50 or 100 million or perhaps \$300 million out of this year's budget because that's the way they operate. Just spend, just spend, just spend. Cut the taxes and balance the budget. With that kind of economic thinking, with that kind of fiscal planning, that isn't going to solve anyone's problem in this province.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there has been change in this province for the last two or three years. We went from balanced budgets for the first eight or nine years of the NDP government, and then we went under this Premier to — what? — three deficit budgets. We're on four now.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — So there has been change. And the Premier said we don't like change. Mr. Chair. We don't like that kind of change. We believe in balanced budgets.

And, Mr. Chair, I would go on to say . . . and I'm really questioning the Premier. These are important questions to the people of rural Saskatchewan, but they are important questions to every homeowner, business owner, property owner in this province because we're talking education tax. In the last 12 years, we've downloaded education tax onto the property owner from 40/60 to 60/40, and I know the Premier's going to get up and say it was never that high. Well it was that high. It was very close to 60/40. And now it's even gone past 40/60 the other way, Mr. Chair.

And Mr. Chair, I want to ask the Premier about the last election because I know it got him votes because people trusted him at that point. They may not now, but they certainly did at that time. And I think it depended how people voted. They weren't sure about the new party because the NDP kept saying don't trust those guys. Trust us because we're good for our word, Mr. Chair.

Well I want to give a quote, and it's not exactly a quote, Mr. Premier, but I think it's very close to what you said. You said we have room to receive the recommendations of the Boughen Commission on the funding of education tax within the resources available. Now as a taxpayer and a voting person in this province, I would take that that he could start to deal — and that's all the people are asking out there — deal with that

problem with the resources he had available.

And he goes on to say our platform is affordable, practical, and realistic. Well I guess my question, Mr. Chair, is what's with that? What happened to that? Where did that go, because the people of Saskatchewan filled these galleries, Mr. Chair. They wanted to know what happened to that promise, and I want to give that Premier the opportunity tonight, with nobody in the gallery but people watching out there, to explain to rural delegates, reeves, councillors, and administrators . . . and I'm sorry, one person, and I apologize for that, and he's quite interested. He probably wants to know what I want to know.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — In fact I think he wants to know what reeves, councillors, and administrators, in fact every property tax owner out there that paying education tax, what they have to say.

I want to give the Premier an opportunity to explain how you can have an election and promise to deal with something, and within minutes forget what you said, what you promised, and said well, it'll be four years to election if we can hang on, and don't trust them guys over there.

Mr. Premier, will you explain to this province what you meant by those comments in the election campaign?

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, I indicated during the campaign, through our policy platform, on platforms across the province, that we intend to govern this province for four more years, for four more years of good fiscal management, of four more years of good fiscal management.

Now again . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I knew that would wake them up, you see because there's a group of people, there's a group of people in Saskatchewan who wouldn't know good fiscal management if they ran right into it. And they're all right over there.

You see, Mr. Chair, they talk about poor fiscal management, but what does Standard & Poor of New York City talk about? Well they talk about balanced budget. They talk about strong fiscal management. They talk about economy that has potential. They talk about a strong economy today. And what is the result? They give this province and its people a credit rating upgrade.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — That's what you get from Standard & Poor.

You get this political rhetoric from the members opposite day after day after day, till the people of Saskatchewan don't even listen to it anymore. But I'll tell you; they do listen to Moody's of New York City. They do listen to Standard & Poor. The member from Melville-Saltcoats, the member from . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Now you see, the authority of fiscal management from Kindersley is coming right out of his seat.

Well perhaps the authority on fiscal management from Kindersley would like to stand in his seat and tell the people of Saskatchewan why he knows more about fiscal management than Moody's of New York or Standard & Poor of New York. I wonder if he would stand on his feet and explain how he is so much wiser than the bond rating agencies. Perhaps the member from Melville-Saltcoats could explain why he knows so much more.

Or perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could explain to the people of Saskatchewan why the Saskatchewan Party who, when they had the opportunity to govern Saskatchewan, put us in the hole where we had a rate of debt to GDP (gross domestic product) of 61 per cent — a basket case in all of Canada.

Now the pattern of this party in government and the pattern of this administration and the pattern of this Premier, is to set priorities, to work out plans that will bring reality to those priorities. We set out a priority to renovate the personal income tax system in Saskatchewan, Mr. Chair. We put that plan in place. It took us four years. It took us four years. And if I may say, the inequity there is not as long-standing as it has been on the property tax.

We have put a plan in place to renovate, to reorganize the government's delivery of education to make it fairer. And as we work through, we have set as our next priority in tax reform, the reform of the education portion of the property tax.

Now I know members opposite would like us to spend the money right now. They'd like us, I guess, to spend \$300 million. Although interestingly enough, the member who raises the questions tonight, when asked by his local press what about the Boughen Commission, what about the recommendations of the Boughen Commission, well the member from Melville-Saltcoats said, I quote:

The . . . (Saskatchewan) Party is firmly opposed to increasing taxes, and would have no choice (no choice) but to block any provincial sales tax increase, noted Bjornerud, even though it may mean the retention of the education tax on agricultural property, at a time (the) farmers badly need tax relief.

And then he says, "It puts us in a very precarious position." Well I tell you, they are in a precarious position in the eyes of the people of Saskatchewan when on a daily basis they say cut the taxes, cut the taxes. But then one after another they come into this estimate, they come into this House, they come into question period, saying spend more, spend more, spend more.

(20:30)

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the Premier's sense of humour because I notice he even couldn't say good fiscal management without a smile on his face.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Chair, the Premier talks about patterns,



and the only pattern I've seen in this province in the last three or four years under his premiership is three or four consecutive deficits, and the provincial debt's gone up \$1.5 billion. That's the pattern we have in Saskatchewan today.

Under the previous NDP premier . . . and I didn't agree with him very much of the time. I learned great respect for him because he had — what? — eight or nine balanced budgets. That ended quickly when this Premier won the leadership of the NDP. And now he says trust us because I'm credible. What were his words here? I can't remember. He goes on to say just believe me; just trust me, Mr. Chair.

And, Mr. Chair, the Premier goes on to say, and I've heard him say this at SARM convention and that . . . he said changes won't happen overnight. He said the problem didn't happen overnight. You bet they didn't, Mr. Chair. It took 12 years of NDP government to cause the problem.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — The problem wasn't there when this government came to power. But the problem was developed when this government blamed everybody from Grant Devine to the federal government. And I think they actually blamed the farmers in this province because that's who they mainly asked to balance the books in this province. And that's when the 60/40 flipped to 60/40 the other way.

So, Mr. Chair, the Premier can stand in his place and say we have a plan; we have a way we're going to fix the education tax on property. Well if he has, we haven't seen it. The farmers and the rural representatives surely haven't seen it because they wouldn't keep filling the galleries here if they had any idea that there would be any relief with the education tax on property.

And, Mr. Premier, I'd like to ask you, and I want to give you a chance tonight, Mr. Premier, because you said at SARM convention you said the status quo is not on. You had an opportunity tonight to explain yourself, and you did a really poor job of it because even I didn't understand it, and I was listening, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, you went and you said at SARM convention, you said at the election . . . in fact you said at the election, don't trust the guys on this side of the House. You know I almost voted for you because I wasn't sure about these guys. I was beginning to waiver.

I went to my care home. I went to my care home and I got leaflets put out by some of your supporters. And they said in my care home — and my mom is in there, and if I don't get it right she'll straighten me out, Mr. Premier — but the leaflets said don't trust the Sask Party because if the Sask Party gets in, you know in the Saltcoats care home what they're going to do? They're going to privatize the laundry. They're going to privatize dietary. And you know, I almost believed that, Mr. Premier, except then I found out that you had already done it. You done it. You beat us to it, Mr. Premier. And you know, the funny part is with that rhetoric there was actually workers that believed it.

And the funny part was to start with they were my supporters until I straightened them out. And as you know, I won the seat, Mr. Premier.

So, Mr. Premier, you know I think what it boils down to . . . and I think all the SARM delegates were asking, and I think everybody on this side of the House knows that the last election, the aftermath boils down to integrity, honesty, and trust.

And, Mr. Chair, you know how far I can go on this one, and I don't dare go too far. But Mr. Premier, you know where I'd like to go because we have people in this province that believed you, Mr. Premier. The last election they believed that Premier and I don't think . . . Does anybody on this side think that it will work again? Absolutely not. And I think, Mr. Premier, you know it won't work again. We got to manufacture some new idea that people might fall for because after 12, 13 years of an NDP government, there is a limit to what anybody can put up with.

Mr. Premier, I'd like to go over some of the headlines in the paper over the last few years. This one is from the *Leader-Post* and it's actually . . . they're talking to Neal Hardy and the headline is, "It's becoming harder (and harder) to trust the NDP."

They go on here . . . and here is a quote from Neal Hardy, Mr. Premier, the president of SARM, and he summed it up in a question of trust and he said, "Sometimes people have to keep their word." Well I agree with Mr. Hardy on this one. I think most Saskatchewan voters and Saskatchewan taxpayers would believe in this.

And then I go on to quote Murray Mandryk, and I know you are a fan of his, Mr. Premier. I am too. And it says, and this is Murray's quote, not mine, Mr. Premier:

"Somehow there's a line of trust there and I think they've reached that line of trust."

This has been the problem with the Lorne Calvert government has faced since November 5 election.

And you know what he is talking about there, Mr. Premier. We all do. And now the public of Saskatchewan is certainly catching on what he talks about. I go to another quote later in the same column and it says, and I quote, Mr. Chair, so I am within the rules.

(Shame on Calvert for the William Jefferson Clinton-like weasel-wording we heard from him in Thursday's question period (I'm quoting, Mr. Chair) suggesting that his "status quo is not on" commitment could be interpreted to mean the government planned to address this issue in years down the road.)

SARM delegates didn't understand it that way. I was at the last year's convention, and I was at this year's convention. And the Premier made that comment in his speech, his address to the delegates, nearly 2,000 of them, Mr. Chair. That's not what they got out of this.

They got that that Premier was going to honour his commitment in the election and start to deal with it. All they wanted the other day, Mr. Premier, was you to go out on the steps — and I reiterate — you go out on the steps, not your Minister of

Government Relations with his wee little bit of arrogance. They wanted you, Mr. Chair, to go out on those steps and say to them, we can't solve your problems all this year. That's not what they were asking. They knew you couldn't, Mr. Premier. What they were saying is, we can find \$42 a barrel for oil. We can find a few bucks for the education tax. We will start to reverse the direction that my government has taken this in. We know we were wrong to do it. We will right that wrong, and we will start to address that problem.

Mr. Premier, why did you not go out and tell them what little bit of what they wanted to hear, that you actually could afford a little bit of money for rural ratepayers, in fact urban and rural ratepayers to honour your last fall's election promises?

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well, Mr. Chair, for pure entertainment value I go with the member for Saltcoats.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — He makes his points. He makes his points. He makes his points with flourish. He makes his points well. The trouble is, the trouble is he rarely touches on the truth.

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

**The Chair:** — Order. Order. Order. I would ask hon. members to follow the rules of parliamentary procedure, and I would caution members to stay within those rules. I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Well let me say this, Mr. Chair. The member stood a moment ago and made the claim that 12 years ago, 1991, the funding for education was 60 per cent provided by province and 40 per cent provided by the property taxes. Well that, Mr. Chair, is not accurate. It is not accurate. And if you're going to base your argument on inaccuracy, it's not going to be a very strong argument. The fact of the matter is in 1991 the province contributed about 45 per cent, and the property tax base about 55 per cent. That's the fact. Now that's the fact.

Now we admit that it's skewed and in fact the division has grown, even with the injections of money that this government has found for both revenue sharing and the K to 12 system. Mr. Chair, in the last five years, five years, 125 million new dollars that we found for K to 12 education, in the last three years another \$30 million for revenue sharing — now the member opposite says it's not enough, it's not enough.

Well I understand that, but would he . . . Would he or his leader define tonight what is enough, how much? How much more should we spend on K to 12 education in this budget year? How much more in this budget year should we spend on property tax relief?

And while they're at it, they can give us the number . . . they can give us the number on how much we should be spending in this budget on health because apparently it's not enough. How much in this budget should we be spending on agriculture because we're told on a daily basis it's not enough? How much

more on highways? And after they total all this up — my little running total is that I think they've spent about 300 million in this session alone.

Now what they should then do is tell us where these dollars are going to come from because they clearly reject, they clearly reject any tax increase, and they say in fact we should be cutting all the taxes.

Is it, Mr. Chair, what the Saskatchewan public concluded, that the only way you can run that kind of fiscal management of a government is that if you start selling off the assets and selling them off very quickly? Is that how they intend to fund this more, more, more, cut the taxes? There is only one way. You either borrow your way into that kind of fiscal management — that's what they did in the 1980s — then when they ran out of borrowing power, they started selling in the 1980s.

It's the same old right-wing economic philosophy that got this problem into big problems, that got this problem into a situation where we are not able to fund education as we would like or health care, got this problem reflected in this year's budget where we are spending — get this, Mr. Chair — over \$600 million in interest payments on the debt that their philosophy ran up in government. Do you know what we could do about the property taxes in this province or health care or education if we had access to that \$600 million that we take from the people of Saskatchewan and pay off to the bond dealers and the bankers on account of the debt that they ran up on the people of Saskatchewan?

That kind of economic philosophy, which is promoted today by the Saskatchewan Party, as it's been promoted by their predecessors in this province, the Conservatives. It's the same kind of economic kind of theories that we see reflected in the Alliance and the Conservative parties. What does it do? It handicaps people for generations.

You know, Mr. Chair, we today have a credit rating upgrade from Standard & Poor. A credit rating upgrade that it's taken this province since 1986 to return to the situation we enjoyed in 1986.

It's taken — what's that, that's 18 years — 18 years of work on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to put this back right in terms of our credit rating in the American agencies, 18 years. That's how long you pay after you have that kind of philosophy governing the province.

We have set out a plan. We have made it a commitment. We have set out a plan to address in a fundamental way, in a fundamental way, the funding of education in this province.

And I'm going to conclude by this. And you know, our first goal in reform of property taxation with the funding of education, our first goal is to provide for our young people quality education. That's what we're about. And that's what this whole plan is about — to fund sustainable, quality education for the young people of Saskatchewan because that's the key to their future and it's the key to all of our futures in this great province.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well, Mr. Chair, the Premier said in his comments there that all the opposition here wants him to do is spend. That's not quite right. What the opposition and people of Saskatchewan would like that Premier and that government to do is honour the commitments they made.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Whatever they promised to do in the last election, including dealing with the education tax on property — both urban and rural — all they're asking is deal with it because again, I quote:

(We have) . . . room to receive the recommendations of the Boughen Commission on (the) funding of education (within the resources available).

That Premier knew how bad a shape this province was in. Mr. Chair, he helped get it in this shape. He knows exactly how bad it is in this province. But he didn't let on one word about that when the election was on. He goes on to say, and I quote again, Mr. Chair, "We are very confident in our budget revenue projections."

So he's talking about what state the province is in, based on what we see happening in the economy. In fact I'm confident now . . . and down the road for several years . . . And on November 6, Mr. Chair, that went out the window. That promise, that commitment he made to Saskatchewan people went out the window.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to talk . . . and I brought this up, Mr. Premier, in . . . and I know that due to time we have to hurry here because as some of us get older, our bed time is coming quick, Mr. Premier. But I got another few questions to ask you.

I want to bring up a thing that I brought up in question period the other day, and I think it's a good comparison, Mr. Chair. I think it's a very fair comparison. I have a ratepayer that lives in Saskatchewan, farms right along the Manitoba border. He has a quarter of land on the Saskatchewan side; he has a quarter of land on the Manitoba side. The education tax portion on the Saskatchewan side is \$477. The municipal tax together with the education tax, his total on the quarter is \$848, Mr. Premier.

(20:45)

Now I've heard you talk about European subsidies and American subsidies and how it's not fair for our farmers. Well one of the questions I have for you, Mr. Premier, is how come the land on the Manitoba side, the total tax bill, between education and municipal added together, is \$418? Very comparable quarters owned by the same farmer 99 feet apart. You know what the difference is? . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No. Actually it's not, Mr. Premier. It's a socialist government on both sides. So what is the difference?

Mr. Premier, the difference is about 450 bucks to farmers in Saskatchewan that pay 450 bucks a quarter more than farmers in Manitoba. That's not fair. If the subsidies aren't fair that the Europeans have and the Americans have, you better take a look, Mr. Premier, because somebody's not treating our farmers very fairly.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Premier, before I sit, I have to ask you a little bit about agriculture because your Ag minister today has been chirping a lot over there. And I don't know what he's got to chirp about, because I wouldn't be bragging if I was Ag minister for an NDP government.

The CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) program, Mr. Premier, you're always complaining about the federal government never giving enough in Saskatchewan and we agree with you. They don't pay what they should to the province of Saskatchewan. But you know . . . And here comes the Ag minister. We'll be clued in now, Mr. Speaker.

We asked to include the negative margins in the new plan, Mr. Chairman. We asked the federal government and we agreed with that. Everybody that represented farmers on this side said this is a good thing. APAS (Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan) said, that's a good thing. SARM said, that's a good thing. They also said, let's increase the cap. The cap was too low. I believe it was — what, like \$100,000 — should have been higher, we agreed with that.

Finally though, what the government of the day in Saskatchewan didn't expect is the federal government caved in and they said, okay, we'll include negative margins; we'll increase the cap. And do you know what our government had the nerve to say, Mr. Chair? Oh we don't like that; now we're not signing that.

You know why they don't sign that? Because they won't stand behind the farmers of Saskatchewan. They haven't for 12 years and they have no intention under this Premier of standing behind our Saskatchewan farmers today.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — And you know, I've heard this Premier make speeches. I've heard that Ag minister make speeches. And I've heard a number of others that didn't know what they're talking about on that side about agriculture make speeches. And they blame everybody else. They blame the European subsidies. They blame the American subsidies.

We got the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). We got drought. We've got so many things going against our farmers in Saskatchewan. And you know, Mr. Chair, we've got a little rain this spring and there's a little optimism out there. The only thing that are holding farmers back is that NDP government because it's the only government in Canada that's not standing behind their farmers.

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

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Chair, the CFIP program which is winding down right now is \$25 million short in Saskatchewan. And they say, don't go to the west and compare with Alberta. Okay, we'll quit. We'll go back to Manitoba under the other socialist government in this country, and they're honouring their commitment — they don't like it, and we don't blame them — but they're honouring their commitment to farmers in Manitoba, Mr. Chair.

Now we come to the new CAIS (Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization) program, and as I talked before, the federal government made the changes they want and they still don't want to go into it. And, Mr. Chair, I want to tell you tonight — if you don't know already, and I'm sure you do because we brought this up enough — that there's a shortfall in Saskatchewan's funding from about 130 to \$150 million. And that's the Saskatchewan share. And that's the problem our farmers have to try and survive in this province.

And, Mr. Premier, you know as well as I do, it hurts to have to try and find that money, although mind you, you spill more than that in the Navigatas, the SPUDCOs, (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) all around the world. I think you went into . . . didn't you go into an Australian telephone company? That's helping our rural people in Saskatchewan. Wasn't that to the tune of \$40 million? I think it was \$40 million you wasted down there. Navigata — we got what, another 25 million?

Mr. Premier, if you had the will to help farmers in this province, I believe you could do it, even in the situation this province is in. Mr. Premier, I will stop at this point because I know you're wearing thin. But I would want you to stand up tonight and explain to the farmers in this province why this is the only province in Canada that doesn't have a government that will stand behind them.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, again we've been subjected to a flight of rhetoric from the Sask Party that does not reflect the realities. And they know it and the people of Saskatchewan know it and the farming people of Saskatchewan know it. They know that this province stands behind its producers — if you use per capita financial support — at a level higher than any other province in the country. Far higher than any other province in the country.

Now the member of Melville-Saltcoats draws comparisons with Manitoba. I'm curious, Mr. Chair, if before announcing these comparisons, that the . . . if the member has done any real, significant research. He compares two tax notices. I mean, are these tax notices on land of equal assessment? Has he . . . are we comparing apples to apples?

Perhaps he'd like to compare the budgets of our two provinces. The budget of course of the Government of Manitoba, having never been subjected — the people of Manitoba having never been subjected to this group of men and women in government, today have an interest payment on their public debt which is half, about half of what the Saskatchewan people have to pay on their interest on their public debt to meet what that group of men and women inflicted on the province. About half — that's about \$300 million difference.

He will know, if he's paid any attention to current debate about equalization, that our neighbours to the east last budget year received \$1.2 billion in equalization, while this province receives \$120 million in equalization. He will know, he will know that the province of Manitoba has the payroll taxes that do not exist in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now if he's comparing apples to apples, I think he should also then compare the costs of the APF (agricultural policy framework) expenditures, province by province. I think he would have the people of Saskatchewan believe that the agricultural economy and particularly the grain sector in Manitoba is something equal to Saskatchewan's. Well it's not, and he knows it. It's significantly smaller.

In fact, in terms of APF expenditures, under the CAIS program Manitoba is expected to provide \$143 million for that program — 143. Mr. Chair, guess how much Saskatchewan's expected — \$529 million. Guess how much Alberta is expected — \$334 million. Now he is saying, he is saying, as is the federal government, that the citizen of Saskatchewan should provide per capita five times the level of funding of other Canadians when our agricultural production both feeds the nation — the nation, not the province — it feeds the nation, and our agricultural production contributes significantly to the balance of payments to gross domestic product of the nation of Canada.

Now if he's arguing that the federal government should not bear the responsibility for the food production that feeds all Canadians and for that . . . Well the member from Melville-Saltcoats said we should do precisely what the federal government says we should do, put in \$529 million in the CAIS program.

Now how is it that this opposition that claims to represent Saskatchewan people, every time we want to support Saskatchewan farmers, will take the line of Ottawa? Why is it every time when we're fighting for fair trade support for our agricultural producers, they won't stand with us? How is it every time we fight for improvements in programs, they won't stand with us? Why don't they, just for once, why don't they just for once, Mr. Chair, stand up for the people of Saskatchewan, stand up for the producers of Saskatchewan as we have stood up for them and will continue to stand up for them?

And before I take my place, note this, Mr. Chair. In the most recent budget of the Government of Saskatchewan, only three areas of expenditure, only three, received increase. One, health care; two, education; and three, support for agriculture.

We stand behind our agricultural producers. I invite the Saskatchewan Party to join with us.

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

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Chairman, we're getting to the end of the Premier's estimates, I guess, for this particular sitting of the Legislative Assembly. And you know, if people happened to endure this from its beginning — watching it on television or those who may want to review the public record — even the printed word I think, Mr. Chairman, will highlight the fact that there just isn't a lot of zip over on that side of the House.

There's not a lot of enthusiasm over on that side of the House. There's no discernible energy on that side of the House. I don't hear coming from that side of the House any vision, any long-term vision for the province. It's all the Premier can do . . .

four questions it took to drag out of this Premier even the remotest semblance of an admission that we need to get our population growing in the province of Saskatchewan. That the fact that we have not grown in population since 1929 — long before we discovered how naturally endowed we are as a province, long before that — the fact that our province hasn't grown since then doesn't even seem to faze this Premier.

It doesn't seem to faze this government. We have members of his government, members of his government caucus saying, we don't need to grow; they're tired of hearing about growing the province. The member from Regina Wascana who said it's not realistic to set a growth target of 1 per cent of the national average.

This Premier, Mr. Chairman, this government is just devoid of any vision at all. Instead, they simply want to continue to do the same old things that have gotten us to where we have gotten over the last six decades. Yes, including under other different political parties in Saskatchewan.

In fact this very budget . . . well the Minister of Finance laughs. He laughs. If you look down at the quotes of the Finance minister from the past or the Premier from the past when he was a critic — remember those days, Mr. Chairman? — he was an ardent critic against any kind of gambling expansion. Now he's wholly dependent on the revenue, Mr. Chairman.

But if you take a look at the public record, you take a look at the public record, this government is repeating the same mistakes we have repeated, our governments have repeated for six decades. Relying on the same tired old approach.

Even in this budget, Mr. Chairman, even in this budget, the Premier will want to acknowledge this. He's got 50 million more dollars to directly risk into businesses in the province of Saskatchewan. That's their plan to get things growing. He couldn't unequivocally say that a uranium . . . private sector uranium company, who had the means and satisfied all of the safeguards and were willing to build a refinery in the province, he couldn't even bring himself to say unequivocally that they would be welcomed here.

But he's got \$50 million more for what? For more SPUDCOs, Mr. Chairman? For more SPUDCOs, \$28 million. Maybe for Navigata outside of our province, over \$20 million. He maybe has more \$8.9 million for agdealer.com. Remember that?

Or maybe he's got \$2 million for Clickabid. Remember that one, Mr. Chairman? That was the NDP's attempt to compete with that tiny little Internet company known as eBay, Mr. Chairman.

Maybe he's got \$12 million more for the Future is Wide Open campaign which became very, very apparent in the end that it was more about their plans to try to get re-elected than it was ever about growing the province. And they have 50 million more dollars to directly risk in business.

You know, Mr. Chairman, the Saskatchewan Party has been encouraging the people of this province to start asking the Dr. Phil question, and they are. They're now asking us, you know the question: how's that working for you? Mr. Chairman, it has

let this province down and it's not just this Premier's fault. It's not just his predecessor's fault or the one before that or before that. For six decades we've been doing the same thing.

There is one political party in this province that gets it. Not because we have the answers to all of its problems. Not because there are any magic wands or easy solutions but because there are examples around this world of labour governments, conservative governments, who have employed certain tactics and turned their economies around, turned their countries into comeback economies.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — You know, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, the good news is this. Even though there's no zip over there and there's no energy over there, there doesn't seem to be a vision, the good news is this, Mr. Chairman: the people of the province understand that there are things we can do. That there are things that we can do to turn this province around so that this province, this province that we love, will be the comeback province, Mr. Speaker, in the country.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — So that we will be a have province, Mr. Chairman, a have province. So that we don't need to rely on assistance any more from other jurisdictions. So that our government one day will have the resources that it needs, Mr. Chairman, so that it is not having to rely on some other have province to help producers with BSE or to help keep promises, help keep promises that the Premier might have made in a campaign about providing property relief.

(21:00)

You know, I've got some interesting quotes here for you, Mr. Chair. I just want to run them over, run through them quickly for you, and it won't take a lot of time but they're interesting.

. . . if this government were sincere in wanting to help the households and the homes and the families of Saskatchewan, then I say it would get its hand(s) out of the hip-pocket, the wallets, the purses, and the bank accounts of Saskatchewan people.

**An Hon. Member:** — Who said that?

**Mr. Wall:** — The Premier said that in 1990.

The problem in this province is that . . . (the) government has spent way, way (way) too much.

The Premier said that, 1991.

. . . I'm very afraid that those same visitors from Alberta . . . that same carload will some day return home, and they'll be telling their friends and neighbours: avoid Saskatchewan; they tax you to death over there.

Do you know who said that, Mr. Chairman? Well it was the Premier, as a matter of fact. The Premier said that.

... if they think that they can go (if they think they can go) to the people of Saskatchewan and say, we need more money, then you ... better clean up your own act first.

And do you know who said that, Mr. Chairman? Well as a matter of fact, the Premier said that as well in 1991.

So their question is, where are you going to go and get the money, Mr. Speaker. The question they should be answering is: where are you going to save the money.

Guess who said that? It was the Premier in 1991.

And here's the best one of all. This is now the current Premier in government. In the good old days, though — at least on the NDP side — when Mr. Romanow was the premier, and here was his quote, from 1992.

... perhaps every member of this government ought to have a plaque on their desk which reads: the debt stops here.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — And so the question will be to the Premier, on behalf of the people of the province, on behalf of the opposition, what happened to his plaque? Where did his plaque go? This Premier that inherited a surplus from his predecessor and has promptly turned it into deficit budgets and has promptly added a billion and a half to the provincial debt, and we ask him today, where is his plaque, Mr. Chairman?

He apparently threw it in the garbage can, maybe with all of the business plans of SPUDCO and maybe the imaginary ethanol plant or that ... Remember that Colombian Internet scam from earlier this year? I think it was the current member for Moose Jaw North who bought into that on behalf of the Premier. It was \$3,000 for us to buy into an Internet scam that would declare us the cultural centre of the world or something to that ... or maybe it was of the universe.

Again, Mr. Chair ... Well that member who's a little embarrassed is waiting for the question. I think we'll spend a little more time actually on some of these issues but we will get to the question, I assure that member.

Maybe the plaque that says, the debt stops here, maybe the Premier threw it into the wastepaper basket with the business plan for Retx.com — Retx.com, a \$26 million investment in Atlanta, Georgia.

And here's the problem with all of that, Mr. Chairman. The problem with all of that is all of those investments and losses have been piled up in the very, very recent history of our province. And all along, all along when the Premier has been asked to keep his promises ... and yes, we have asked a lot of those questions this session because he made some specific promises in the campaign and we were going to hold him to an account for those. And all along when we ask him those questions — why have you not kept these promises? — the Premier says, he pleads poverty.

The equalization problem ... the member for Saskatoon Nutana

is now chirping from her seat, she who also of course must have been instrumental in this, in their master strategy to offer the lowest utility rates in all of Canada right now. That was during the election — right now. And then after the election it became maybe, sort of, kind of, at some point in the future, Mr. Chairman.

So she'll forgive me, she'll forgive me if I don't take a lot of solace from her comfort as to why the Premier is not keeping his promises when she simply can't keep hers either, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — But when the Premier is asked about these promises, when he's asked about ... and when he's asked about serious issues — and we've raised them here in estimates and we've raised them in question period — whether it happens to be the conference centre raised by the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood or whether it's addictions or crystal meth, or whether it's just the Premier's own promises, he pleads poverty, doesn't have any money. It's either he doesn't have any money currently or if equalization one day is fixed, he might be able to possibly get around to keeping his promises.

But if you add up the list, those lists of recent losses, you're going to find in excess of \$300 million, Mr. Chairman. You're going to find \$50 million in this budget and \$50 million in the next one. I think it's 50 million over the next four years, 200 million more dollars, and it's not just ... I guess what's frustrating about it, it's not just good money after bad in terms of an economic approach that hasn't worked for any government in this province that's tried it for all these decades. It's not just that. It's not just that it is based on an approach to the economy that simply doesn't work, that has betrayed the great potential of Saskatchewan.

What's perhaps more frustrating is that all of these millions, these hundreds of millions in investment and the 50 million more over the next four years, are made on behalf of a government, on behalf of a Premier that says, I can't keep the promises that I made because I have no money.

Mr. Chairman, that rings very, very hollow for the people of this province, and that's why they're disappointed. That's why people that didn't vote for the Premier are disappointed, to be sure. And frankly, what we're hearing increasingly is that's why the people that did vote for this Premier are disappointed because even those that voted for him, even those that voted for him who may have believed, Mr. Chairman, that while the government didn't seem to be very competent, i.e., SPUDCO, while it didn't seem to have their best interests at heart in terms of turning a surplus from Mr. Romanow into a deficit under the current Premier, while it didn't seem competent, at least I think that many that voted for him said, well we trust him. We trust him.

And systematically almost on every single promise that this Premier made when he went around this province, willing to say anything or do anything to win the election, he has systematically broke those promises to the people of the province of Saskatchewan. And I think even the Premier would agree, as his quotes reflected from his days in opposition, that

there is a precious currency in this business, Mr. Chairman, and it's called trust. And I think, I think the Premier's bank account is empty.

And the member for Regina Qu'Appelle wants to chirp in about personal standing or words that a person has to say. This minister who in the last election went to a senior citizen's home in his constituency who had a Sask Party sign and told them that if they voted for the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Chairman, here's what he said: if you vote for them, they'll take away your health care. That's what he said, to the point . . . He scared them to the point where they took down their sign. They took down their sign and they put up one of his until the truth was explained to him, and they took down his sign and put back up a Saskatchewan Party sign.

And you know the best news about it is the minister says it didn't happen, but guess what? Those . . . that couple were brave enough, they had the courage enough to stand up and be interviewed and go on television and say that's what the NDP . . . their NDP candidate, now their NDP MLA, did.

And you know what, Mr. Chairman? That is what's wrong with this government, not just with the Minister of Agriculture, but it's also afflicting the Premier himself and the government. People simply don't trust them and after stunts like that, who would, Mr. Chairman? Who would?

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

**Mr. Wall:** — And so, and so we . . . and so what we have tried to do today, Mr. Chairman, is highlight for the government the fact that we're going to continue to hold them accountable for the promises that they made during the election campaign.

We're going to object to occurrences where they seem to be arrogant, for example when it comes to health care for individual citizens of this province, when they refer to them as patients of the day. We'll hold them to an account for that.

We'll hold them to an account when the minister of Intergovernmental Affairs goes out and threatens SARM delegates on the steps of the Legislative Assembly.

We'll hold them to an account for their promises. When they come up with a good idea — as we highlighted in the Throne Speech, there were some — we will highlight those. We will congratulate them and ask them for specifics.

We'll try to raise constructive issues, such as we did even here earlier tonight with crystal meth. And if it looks like the government is even moving in the right direction, we'll give them the benefit of the doubt.

But above all, above all, Mr. Chairman, what we are going to continue to do on this side of the House is we'll hold this Premier and this government accountable for the need for a vision for this province. We on this side of the House and people across Saskatchewan — rural and urban, north and south — understand that our potential is vast, it is limitless.

But we've got to change what we've been doing for the last six decades. And soon and very soon, Mr. Chairman, I do believe

we are going to get that chance. In the meantime, in the meantime, would the Premier please tell the people of the province just one more time, could he explain why it is they should trust him now or in the future based on his record, based on the promises that he has made and the promises he has broken?

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the Leader of the Opposition throughout the day. We've listened to him intently for the last 15 minutes and what have we heard?

Have we heard a substantive, a substantive comment on public policy? Have we heard one substantive comment about a change that he would make to the provincial budget? I've asked repeatedly today, what would his number be for health care? What would his number be for education? What would his number be for highways and agriculture? Of course, silence on those fronts.

Have we heard how in fact that Leader of the Opposition and his party would pay for the kind of spending, the spending promises and commitments they would have this government make? How would they pay for it? Not a word.

You know, I say again, Mr. Chair, in public life it's not what we say about ourselves. And it's not so much even what we say about each other because, I mean, they'll say what they say and we'll say what we say. What matters is, number one, what the third party validators say. It matters what the bond rating agencies say. It matters, it matters what the people of Saskatchewan say.

The people of Saskatchewan tonight have heard nothing; nothing that they did not hear over the last two or three years. Nothing tonight that they didn't hear prior to the election. And in greater numbers than in 1999, the people of Saskatchewan chose New Democrats to govern this province.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — And I guess there's not much that you're responsible for when you're the Leader of the Opposition. Not much. Although I would have expected from a new leader something different than we've seen today and something different than we've seen over the course of this session.

Because this leader, when he came to the office, when he was made Leader of the Opposition, unelected — no one else seemed to want the job over there — when he came to the office he made some very bold, bold statements on how he was going to lead this opposition in a new direction and how he was going to have this opposition stretch their thinking; how they were going to be less acrimonious; how they would bring to the debate substantive public policy issues.

Have we heard any of that in this session or in this estimate? Not a bit, not a bit, Mr. Chair. But I'll tell you what we have seen in this session which deeply, deeply troubles me. The Leader of the Opposition moments ago talked about accountability. I ask him tonight, will he be accountable, will he be accountable for himself, his party, and his members?

Because in this session we have seen, Mr. Chair, and I think some very, very egregious activity in this Chamber.

Let me begin with this. We had the member from Cypress Hills say in this House about those citizens who now serve on Investment Saskatchewan. He said:

Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the NDP's investment watchdog is lame, blind, deaf, and toothless?

That's what a member of the opposition said about the citizens of Saskatchewan who are serving on Investment Saskatchewan.

That woke them up, didn't it, Mr. Chair?

Well let me ask the Leader of the Opposition this question. On May 12 of this year, on May 12 of this year I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition. I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition on May 12 of this year to ask from him an apology, an apology to the people of Dominion Construction and an apology to the volunteers who the day we celebrated the dig of the lake, provided to the citizens samples of the lake bottom sand.

I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition after Mr. Brian Barber, very publicly, very publicly made it very clear that the Saskatchewan Party — I need to be careful with my language here, Mr. Chair — that the Saskatchewan Party, that the Saskatchewan Party had made a mockery of what was a fine gesture; of how information provided in this House was wrong, was wrong.

Now will the Leader of the Opposition, since he has not even provided to me the courtesy of a reply or an acknowledgement to my letter of over a month ago, will the Leader of the Opposition today, will he apologize on behalf of his caucus, for the stunt, the stunt, that they pulled in this legislature with no basis in fact?

(21:15)

Now, Mr. Chair, will he be responsible tonight? Will he be responsible tonight to speak to the issue which, if I may say, Mr. Chair, in my time in this legislature, I'm not sure I have seen, I have seen this legislature fall to the depth that it did that day when the Deputy Leader of the Opposition stood in his place and, with reference to a letter which apparently they had done no checking on, accused Mr. Tom Waller, the new head of the Crown Investments Corporation, on the basis of a letter that he had received, of painting Mr. Tom Waller as being under criminal investigation.

Now I in my time, Mr. Chair, in this House, have never seen that kind of an attack on a public service. It's one thing to attack citizens who are working on an investment board. It's another thing to attack Mr. Barber and Dominion Construction and the volunteers. But I tell you, when you stand in this House and attack a public servant who has no ability to respond, that, Mr. Chair, is the kind of opposition that I never thought I would see in the province of Saskatchewan, now being led by this new leader.

Now I have received and the Leader of the Opposition has

received a letter from the Peepeekisis Band, from the Peepeekisis Band, expressing their outrage over this attack on Mr. Tom Waller. I won't bother, because of the hour, to read it into the record.

Now what this new leader should do, and what that opposition should do over there, is be true to their word. Be true to their word. If this is a new opposition, then I believe the Leader of the Opposition needs to demonstrate some new tactic and some willingness to apologize on behalf of his party and his caucus.

Now, Mr. Chair, we've had some debate today, not substantive debate because there's nothing being offered from the other side. But this government, Mr. Chair, this government has laid before the people of Saskatchewan in Throne Speech, in policy and platform, in Throne Speech, and in budget, a solid plan to take this province into its next century. That's what we're about, Mr. Chair — to take this province into its next century, to make this province ready for its next generation of young people.

We're doing that by building a green and a prosperous economy — a green and a prosperous economy with no new assistance from the members opposite, but an economy that's producing more jobs and opportunities for Saskatchewan people, more educational opportunities for Saskatchewan people, more opportunities to participate in the new green economy, Mr. Speaker. We're doing that. We're doing that, and we're providing the best quality public health care that we can provide in this province. And we are going to stand firm, no matter what the opposition. We're going to stand firm to the principles of medicare, publicly funded and publicly administered medicare.

We're going to open doors and . . . you know, Mr. Chair, they can shout from their seats. They can holler all they want, but they won't prevent this government from doing the right things for the people of Saskatchewan with all of their shouting.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — And the negativity, Mr. Chair, the negativity that continues to proceed from this opposition is rejected by the people of Saskatchewan tonight, the same way it was rejected in the fall. And, Mr. Speaker, for all the naysayers over there, we're still working and we're joining with the people of Saskatchewan to build a future for this great province.

And I'm going to end with this because I heard the Leader of the Opposition, from his bench tonight say that he wants to make this the — what? — the comeback province. Mr. Chair, this province began a comeback in 1991.

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — And I'll tell you, and I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, tonight in the nation of Canada, this province is taking leadership — leadership in the economy; leadership in developing our resources; leadership in programs for people, be it housing or health care or education; leadership in building a strong national economy; leadership on behalf of the farming people of Canada. This province is taking leadership. We're not some comeback province. We're a province that's taking leadership, and we intend to keep it that way in spite of Her



Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

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

**The Chair:** — Order. Administration (EX01) for the amount of \$2,431,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried.

Subvote (EX01) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — Accommodation and central services (EX02) for the amount of \$952,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried.

Subvote (EX02) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — Premier's office (EX07) for the amount of \$476,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried.

Subvote (EX07) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — Cabinet secretariat and cabinet planning unit (EX04) for the amount of \$1,339,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried.

Subvote (EX04) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — Communications coordination and media services (EX03) for the amount of \$1,063,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried.

Subvote (EX03) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — House business and research (EX08) for the amount of \$420,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried.

Subvote (EX08) agreed to.

**The Chair:** — Members of the Executive Council (EX06) for the amount of \$690,000; amounts in this subvote are statutory. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried.

Subvote (EX06) — Statutory.

**The Chair:** — Amortization of capital assets — amortization is a non-voted, non-cash expense and is presented for information purposes only — for the amount of \$16,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried. Not necessary, but . . .

Therefore resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums for Executive Council for the amount of \$6,681,000.

Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried.

Vote 10 agreed to.

**The Chair:** — The next item before the committee . . . I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Chair, with the leave of the committee, I want to extend thanks to my officials.

**The Chair:** — The Premier's requested leave to express thanks to his officials. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried. I recognize the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you, members. I want to take this opportunity to thank the officials who have joined me for the estimates today. While we didn't call on their specific expertise much during the course of the day, in thanking them tonight, I am thanking them not for their work particularly today, but work that goes on throughout the year in Executive Council, which as you know, Mr. Chair, is the central, central agency of government.

And in thanking these particular public servants who have been with us tonight, I want to extend through them our thanks to the entire public service of the province of Saskatchewan. As that office which leads our public service, I want to say to the entire public service, we are proud of our public servants. They do exceptional work, exceptional work on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

And I would want them to know, through these officials, the gratitude of this government and this legislature for all the work they do. Thank you very much.

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

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the

Premier's officials. First of all I'll thank the Premier for . . .

**The Chair:** — The Leader of the Opposition has requested leave to also thank the officials. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That's carried. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Just before I do that, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the Premier for just a little bit over four hours of his time here today. Certainly he's got a busy schedule and agenda, and we appreciate the time for estimates today.

As well I would like to join with him in thanking the officials, both from Executive Council, his deputy minister, and join him again in thanking through these officials, all of the public servants of the province of Saskatchewan. Wherever they are, they certainly, they certainly go to work dedicated to serve the public, and we want to thank them for all that they do for Saskatchewan and thank them specifically for the four hours that they spent here tonight and today, notwithstanding the fact that maybe they, you know, didn't have to do a lot of advising necessarily, but we want to thank them for their time tonight. Thanks.

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

**The Chair:** — The next item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for the Department of Learning, vote 5, found on page 107 of the Estimates book. We'll take a brief pause while the minister takes his place.

**General Revenue Fund  
Learning  
Vote 5**

**Subvote (LR01)**

**The Deputy Chair:** — The business before the committee is estimates for Department of Learning, administration (LR01). The minister introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm pleased tonight to be joined by a number of officials representing both the post-secondary side and the K to 12 side of the department. Seated next to me, of course, is our deputy minister, Neil Yeates. Next to him is Kevin Hoyt, director of finance for corporate services. Behind him is Kevin Veitenheimer, the director of the university services. Directly behind the deputy minister is Wayne McElree, the assistant deputy minister. Seated directly behind me is Brady Salloum, the executive director of student financial services. We're also joined tonight behind the bar by a number of officials. Actually if it's all right, I'll just introduce them as they come up to join us. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** — The question before the committee is subvote administration (LR01). Is the committee ready for question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to your officials at this late hour. Mr. Minister, last time we were in estimates we had asked for some information regarding the salary grids that pertain to the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) instructors, both the existing grid and the new one as a result of the agreement. I'm wondering if you're able to table that at this time tonight. We've been awaiting that information, and we'd certainly like to have a copy of that this evening.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In fact I can table that this evening. Unfortunately I left it with my assistant who is outside, but I'll send an official out to get it and I'll table it tonight.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We appreciate getting that information this evening.

Further along the same lines, the same topic, we would like to know what the total salary dollars expended by the department on SIAST instructors for the following years, including benefits. And I realize you may not have that information at your fingertips tonight, but we're hoping that we could get that tomorrow from you. From July 1, 2002, to July 1, 2003; July 1, 2003, to July 1, 2004 — we realize that that will be a bit of an estimate, but we should know what those numbers are, and then the forecast for July 1, 2004, to 2005; and July 1, 2005, to July 1, 2006. So for four separate calendar years, we would like to know the salary dollars expended by the department on SIAST instructors, including benefits, the total salary dollars. Is that possible, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I think that is indeed possible. We don't have that detail broken out tonight, but I can provide the member with that. Also once the pages return, I'll send across the salary grid.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Also how many employees are covered in-scope in each of those years? How many employees would that pertain to, and can we expect that information tomorrow some time?

(21:30)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In this particular case it would be helpful to know whether the member's wanting a full-time equivalent numbers or whether he wants to know occupied positions — number of employees. We can certainly provide any of that detailed information. As we're looking at going back over a number of years, it may take us a few days to pull that together, but we can certainly provide that.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, occupied positions I think would be the information that we would require of him, but if he is able to provide both, the full-time equivalents and occupied positions, that would be preferential.

Also, Mr. Minister, can you provide us with the signed agreements with both the SIAST academic bargaining unit and the SIAST support staff? I believe those agreements have been signed now. Can we have copies, official and complete copies of that within the next 24 hours or so?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I can provide the member with a copy of the academic unit. The support unit hasn't ratified yet, and so I won't be able to until that has happened. But once that has, I'll endeavour to do so.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Mr. Minister. That completes my questioning. I wasn't sure about the admin support, if that had been signed or not, but if you could undertake to get it to us as soon as it is signed I'd appreciate it. And thank you again for the many hours of debates and estimates that we've had here, and to your officials, and thank you for providing the information where possible in a prompt and courteous manner. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions of course are going to be directed more to the K to 12 area and some of the issues that surround that. So I imagine the minister will want to change some officials, and I don't know about introducing.

But I guess I would first of all like to thank the minister and his officials for coming tonight at such a late hour. I think probably some of these estimates were planned on being taken care of last week, but unfortunately I was not able to be here. And so I thank the minister and his staff for adjusting their schedule and allowing us to be here at such a fine time as 9:30 at night to answer a few questions.

I'm not going to be very long. We did cover a lot of the issues around amalgamation. I am going to ask some more questions on that. And where . . . because the last time we were together was probably three weeks or better ago. And I know there's been certainly a lot of rumbling in the education community around amalgamation. I've received a lot of correspondence from school divisions, and I'm sure the minister has, and we will get to that in a little bit.

My first questions however are dealing more with the actual, the hard numbers, the monies that are being spent in education, and particularly K to 12. I realize each year that there is some federal money that comes into the province for education through the Department of Learning.

Could the minister give me a ballpark of what money we're receiving through the federal government for Learning. And, I mean, I guess particularly I'd like it broken out K to 12, but if that's not available, just a ballpark number of monies that we receive through the federal government that will be put into the education budget.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Deputy Chair, three things. First of all I'd like to welcome some new officials and introduce them to the Assembly.

Seated behind me is Gillian McCreary, who is the assistant deputy minister. Next to her is Margaret Lipp, who is the assistant deputy minister . . . associate deputy minister. Have we promoted you? Assistant deputy minister. Okay, good. I need to keep that straight. Next to her is Don Sangster. Don is the executive director of school . . . responsible for school

finance. Seated behind him is Michael Littlewood, who is the executive director of legislation and school administration. And next to him is Nelson Wagner, the executive director of facilities.

I also would like to thank the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs for his questions in the last several weeks that we've had an opportunity to discuss on the floor. I've appreciated the debate and certainly the passion and sincerity that he brings to this file.

With respect to the questions asked by the member for Indian Head-Milestone, he asks in particular about the amount of federal support that we receive. I would indicate that we would receive only a very little that is dedicated directly to what we would call education. Of course education is a provincial responsibility. I would characterize most of that money as coming in support for the office of minority languages, and some money for, obviously, student loans, administration, provincial library, promotion of bilingualism, some miscellaneous services, and that appears to be the bulk of it.

There is one other area that we do receive a sizeable amount of money, about \$45 million from the federal government, and that is to deal with Labour Market Development Agreements. But in terms of education, that is almost entirely provincially funded.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have a bit of a printout here of what we received, that the federal government is putting towards Learning. And as I look through it, there doesn't look to be a lot that are pure dollars going right into education. And of course we know it's a provincial responsibility.

My other questions are around the School<sup>PLUS</sup> program and monies that the government has set aside. It certainly was a large announcement made a couple of years ago. And we are certainly in favour of the concept of School<sup>PLUS</sup>. I would like to know where the government is on it, how much money it's putting towards the School<sup>PLUS</sup> program, and some of the, I guess, latest advancements of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> program throughout Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The specific question that was asked was the province's support through the Department of Learning for School<sup>PLUS</sup>. That amount is 15.1 million, which is recognized of course. Other departments provide some expenditures through their services that are offered through the school system also. But that is what is . . . goes through this particular vote.

There are a number of different initiatives which are under way. One of the . . . if I might just identify one of the challenges that we have over the next 18 months, 2 years, is to really put a provincial focus, to make sure we've got a relatively uniform program laid out across the province in terms of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, something identifies viable, something tangible, which is obvious within the schools throughout the province.

We have largely been working on pilot projects over the last couple of years. And there's some very interesting initiatives which have been undertaken. They fall into a number of different categories. And maybe what I'll do is just pick a

sampling of them and provide the member in the House with some opportunity to ask questions in more detail about this as we move on.

Among the areas that we've looked at, certainly one of the newer ones, has been the Community-Teacher Engagement Fund, which has been trying to draw into the School<sup>PLUS</sup> model more of the work and ideas that the individual teachers have about what could work at their school, what are some of the innovative things that we could do to better link up these options. That has been well received.

In the last year and a bit, we have published a number of different publications: *Working Together Toward School<sup>PLUS</sup> Parent and Community Partnerships in Education*, *School<sup>PLUS</sup> Progress Report*. There are a number of regional and provincial forums which have occurred. And a couple of new initiatives under the category of dealing with hidden youth, which I guess is one of the areas which is of particular interest — this being youth who have dropped out of the system are very hard to contain within the system, obviously a target group that we want to participate with.

This includes three new initiatives here, including the student tracking initiative, youth services model — which is being piloted in Regina and Prince Albert — and education in custody facilities which Sask Learning has committed some money to. It obviously deals with youth who are periodically in custody.

There's a number of other initiatives we can talk about, not the least of which is the fact that 39 school divisions are now participating in the improvement initiatives. So there's a lot of different things happening around the province. And one of the benefits of the program is that it's extremely flexible and tries to meet community needs. On the other hand, that also means that it is sometimes difficult to discernibly identify what is tangibly School<sup>PLUS</sup>, as it will vary somewhat from community to community.

**Mr. McMorris:** — One question a little bit further to the School<sup>PLUS</sup>. I was reading through some information that you'd sent over regarding the community teacher program. You just mentioned it there. I don't have the wording quite right, but . . . and I was reading that there were 10 projects agreed to or funded.

How many applications were put forward? I realize that 10 were accepted, but how many . . . what size of a demand are we looking at from the education system?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I know initially some people expressed concern that there was not going to be much take-up on this. In fact we ended up with . . . it says 101 applications were received for this. So I think this really does speak to the potential demand that there is within the school system — certainly identified by teachers — to be able to draw in more community work, and, I think, speaks to potentially the strength of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> project.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Chair, could the minister also explain to me and just fill me in . . . I went through the numbers. I didn't see . . . but for example, what type of contribution does the Department of Health and the Department of Justice and the

Department of Community Resources and Employment, I believe, how does those relationships work with the Department of Education?

I know we've heard . . . and over the four years when we've had groups come in, they say that, you know, it's not uncommon because of different boundaries to have somebody in there from Justice and from Social Services and from Department of Health, none of them really knowing that they were there before. So it's not only just communication as to who's been in the school on a certain day, but also the funding. What type of funding transfers or flows from these departments for students with these needs?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The process that's in place is largely driven at a community level and will vary from community to community as schools identify their need. Certainly one of the issues, and the member identifies this tonight, is the question of how the funding works.

One of the comments that was in Commissioner Boughen's report was that departments should set aside in a specific line item or subvote the amount that they contribute into School<sup>PLUS</sup>. This is one of the issues that I think was quite helpful in the identification under Commissioner Boughen's report. And it's something that we are working on within government to see so that we could point to the Department of Community Resources and Employment and say X number of person-years and tens of millions of dollars is dedicated to support for children at risk or children in the school system.

Today that is, unfortunately, difficult to identify. I think that it is one of the areas that, as we move forward with School<sup>PLUS</sup>, we'll need to more clearly articulate, and it is something that today we are working on an inter-departmental basis. So I regret I am not able to be more specific in terms of the amount of funding. Obviously as we move through this, we'll need to try and more clearly articulate what the specific amount is and how we account for that.

One of the challenges that we do have is that obviously departments offer services to students and youth in different ways. And so it's not always through the school system; it's sometimes in support of the school system. And this is a challenge to then identify the specific amount of money which is targeted to that, as opposed to categorized under other programs.

It is unfortunately one of those accounting-type issues that we'll need to clarify, but I think that certainly the advice provided by Commissioner Boughen is helpful in that regard.

**Mr. McMorris:** — I would suggest that would be very useful because we hear all the time — back when I was in the education system teaching and talking to teachers now — that there's more and more demands, more and more being asked of them and of the school system. And there's always a question as to whether the dollars flow.

(21:45)

I guess I was under the impression before I started tonight that there would be a bit of a grasp on Health put so much in and

Justice and whatever. So there's really no reflection in the numbers in the budget book regarding how much is going to spent in education. In other words, there could be quite a bit more money spent through other departments that don't show up in the Department of Learning's budget. Am I correct there?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In fact the member is correct. There are a number of other initiatives from other departments that deal with children and youth that do support the school system. Examples would be everything from health expenditures to deal with special resources that may be called upon by schools or support through young offenders' services or support through the non-government sector that is funded out of the Department of Community Resources and Employment. This is unfortunately a murky area, and it is one that I think would behoove us all to more clearly identify and brand as School<sup>PLUS</sup> so we can more clearly identify what those resource drawdowns are.

As I talk to educators around the province, and have over the last several months as minister and before that as a member of the caucus, I too was certainly made well aware that teachers in particular, while supportive of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative put this caution on it, that they want to make sure that resources that are added into it come not only through the Department of Learning budget but are clearly identified in the appropriate host departments. This is something I'm very mindful of and something that our government's mindful of and is indeed a large part of the discussion that we're having as we move forward with developing a province-wide rollout of School<sup>PLUS</sup>.

**Mr. McMorris:** — I guess when you talk to some of the school divisions . . . and I can use a couple of examples, and one I guess would come from the Adopt an MLA that Community Living did in a small community that I was in and talking to the mother of a son who had Down's syndrome. And knowing in that school where I had taught in that school that I really don't think if you would have gone back 25 years ago when I was there or 20 years ago, that it would be equipped.

And so there's certain inherent costs that are going to come on school divisions, not only just the structure of the building and what they need in the building, but the transportation. I think in rural Saskatchewan so many of these students now are being transported on buses.

And is there any flow of dollars to cover the cost because certainly the cost now has to be borne by the division board to make sure that these people are integrated and educated, everything that we want to see. But is that cost, is the majority of the cost being borne by the school division and then hence the property tax payers? Or are there dollars to match the extra cost that department or that school divisions are facing across the province?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In part it depends on the spending. The examples that the member uses tonight are largely around special education cost. Those do tend to be factored in already under foundation operating grant and in the department's expenditures.

If I were to use a different example where we may not see that accounted for through the Department of Education but it may

be provided through a different department, would be, for example, where we have after-school programs put into place that would flow nicely into School<sup>PLUS</sup> or we have in place a childcare in our schools. In that case, those expenditures are often undertaken by the Department of Community Resources in support of education and learning but are accounted for under different programs, so would not be identified directly as School<sup>PLUS</sup>.

Health is another example. And certainly the discussions we were having today around challenges for children with autism, some of those support services may be provided by the Department of Health and not specifically identified as being a support to the school system.

So this is, this is an interesting area. It is one where departments have acted to meet what they believe were their responsibilities to children and youth. But we have those identified under a number, a real array of different programs. I think it would be helpful for us, as we move forward over the next 18 months to two years, to more clearly identify those as being supports to the school system, where there are linkages in. Part of this will depend on us being able to devise more of a provincially identifiable School<sup>PLUS</sup> program as opposed to one based on largely on pilot projects and new initiatives.

So this is an evolutionary process. I think it is good that we have the advice coming in now as we're still fairly new into it because this is obviously something which I think Saskatchewan has a real opportunity to take a national lead on and is one that I know that ministers in the government who are responsible for children and youth issues are quite interested in and are working on.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll be interested to follow and see how you make out over the next 18 months to two years and start tracking that a little bit clearer, I guess, because I think it would be of use to understand the, you know, the relationship between the Department of Learning and other departments — financial relationship and the money that transfers back and forth.

I think what I'd like to move to now, because it may take a little while, is the whole issue and the biggest announcement in the last 60 years regarding amalgamation. And, you know, you would think that after that long that the announcement would be really well received. You know, people have been waiting for 60 years for this big announcement, and it maybe hasn't been received quite the way that, probably the way the minister had anticipated. I don't know what his anticipation was before the announcement.

But certainly we have heard an awful lot of feedback. I have a raft of letters here from many school divisions. I've certainly talked to the School Boards Association many, many times. We've talked to the teachers' association. We've talked to a lot of the people that are directly involved with the education system.

And quite frankly, maybe not withstanding one or two divisions, it really hasn't been met with a whole lot of great anticipation of excitement. There have been many, many questions around it. And there have been many people talking

on the side, and we're hearing some rumours that perhaps that government is, and the minister's office, is softening a little bit on some of the criteria that it set out and some of the direction that it had set out.

For one point, for one example, for example, it was said that every school division must be 5,000 students or more. That was certainly mentioned in the minister's speech. And we've done some numbers, and we've looked at maps, and we've certainly seen some of the geographical size of school divisions to get to a population of 5,000.

Can the minister tell me what . . . what he can tell me, what has been going on in the department? And I realize that they've named the other two members to the commission of drawing the boundaries. Can the minister give me a bit of an update on how this — the biggest announcement in 60 years — has gone? And are they looking at changing any of their criteria that they set out roughly about a month and a half ago?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I do have some understanding as to why people only undertake these types of changes once every 60 years. They are certainly worthy of a great deal of debate and certainly consume a great deal of time and effort to make sure they're done appropriately.

I will offer this editorial comment that I must admit I have been pleased with how the responses have been received to date. In many ways the reaction was as expected. In many ways I have been pleasantly surprised by the response. When you take into account the fact that more than half the school divisions in the province will be amalgamated, that we will lose a large number, and we have to expect a certain amount of institutional resistance. Indeed that is a challenge for any well-entrenched and well-established set of organizations who have been doing a good job to date, to believe that in many ways they could continue with the status quo.

However I've been pleasantly surprised by the response of many divisions and many of the educational leaders around the province as they've embraced these changes and suggested that we needed to push forward. In some cases divisions have . . . and pundits have said we have not gone far enough, that we need to push even further ahead.

So in terms of that, I have been generally pleased by the response that we're seeing across the province, pleased by the institutional response of major stakeholders who are certainly putting forward their views in a strong way and in a helpful way. As the member's identified, we have now got in place the task force. I've been very pleased to secure the involvement of two very highly respected trustees, former trustees, whose expertise in this area I think will be particularly helpful.

I am also pleased that we are currently pulling together the restructuring coordinating committee which will deal with a lot of the very meaty and complicated issues to actually operationalize the amalgamations. This will be a good opportunity for key stakeholder groups to participate and pull together their ideas and represent them in terms of making sure that this works at an operational level and on the ground.

With respect to the criteria, the member may characterize it as a

softening of the criteria. I don't see it as that. I have certainly said that if the task force comes back with school divisions that are not quite at 5,000, if they're in the 4,500 range, that I would feel compelled to look at that. I think that that's a reasonable approach.

I'm not trying to be inflexible on this. I'm trying to find a set of solutions that work, that move us towards a sustainable education system so that we hopefully don't have to do this again . . . I think it would be too bold to say for another 60 years, but certainly for a least another few decades, to be able to have an organizational set of changes in place now that'll guide us through that.

So in that regard, we are looking in fact at the criteria remaining relatively stable. I have however suggested to individual school boards that I've met with them . . . I had sent a message to the School Boards Association today saying that where boards are interested in coming forward with proposals in terms of who they think they would best amalgamating with for whatever reasons — whether that be corporate, cultural or geographic issues — that I know that the task force would welcome that advice and would take it into account.

If that's characterized as a softening of our position, so be it. From my perspective, I simply view it as a way to find a common sense approach to moving forward in a way that meets the needs of local boards and local communities. Beyond that, I can't identify any other specific changes that we've made to those criteria, but I'm sure if the member's aware of any, he'll point them out to me.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Well that is interesting. Your response is quite interesting because I do believe that, as compared to what we heard in the speech on May 13, I guess was when the minister made his announcement, a little over a month ago, that there has been some change in your position. Because quite frankly, at that time, and talking to school divisions and the School Boards Association, they were quite sure that it was 5,000 or more and that there was going to be no softening on that.

Now to hear the minister say, well maybe 4,500 which could then maybe be 4,000, I hear . . . see that the minister's shaking his head. So now 4,500 is the number because 5,000 was the number. And now, if there's a softening, I'm not — don't get me wrong — I'm not saying that that's incorrect. I think there needed to be some softening because, to try and put a one size fits all, one size of population fits all across this province, quite frankly, was not doable. Well I shouldn't say it wasn't doable. It was doable, but it wasn't practical.

And to see the minister looking at softening it a little bit and moving it from 5,000 to maybe 4,500, depending on what the recommendation is of the task force . . . and even more now though, to hear the minister say that the task force would be willing to hear proposals put forward by school divisions on what makes sense to them . . . because quite frankly, I think that was one of the biggest stumbling blocks that school divisions felt across this province. And when you look at the School Boards Association, "Decisions made without consultation" is the head of the latest School Boards Association newsletter.

The impression that was left after May 13 was that there was going to be no flexibility whatsoever. There was going to be no consultation so that school divisions, if they made a recommendation because of geographic areas and trading areas, was not going to be accepted. It was going to be the task force making their decision, drawing their map. And it really seemed like it was very rigid, the whole process.

Now to hear the minister talk the way he has tonight, I'm glad we stayed till the time that we have because that certainly has made me feel better. And I think it will make other school divisions feel better.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Deputy . . . No, Mr. Chair, there are a number of other . . . Deputy Chair, a number of school divisions that have sent letters. And I would like to, and I don't know if I have the time . . . But whether it's Eastland Lakes School Division, whether it's Aspen Grove School Division, whether it's South Central, Weyburn's School Division, all of these divisions have gone through amalgamation in the last two or three years.

And all of these divisions are sending letters. These are all addressed to you and you've seen them, I've no doubt. They've all been addressed to you, raising deep concerns with the process that was put in place as of May 13.

(22:00)

I think all of those divisions, along with the school board, will be pleased to hear that it's maybe not locked in at 5,000. It may be able to vary, but more importantly that school divisions will have some input as to where the map and the boundary is going to be, how it's going to be drawn up because, you know, I listen.

I read the one letter from Eastland Lakes School Division, and it talks about the size of the school division. I mean, this division has amalgamated twice and it's gone from, I believe, five or six school divisions down to the one that it's at right now, and it talks about the geographic area that it encompasses, over 10,000 square kilometres, Mr. Chair. And when it talks about some of the staff in that school division and the travel time, they're logging over 8,000 kilometres a month. That translates into over 80 hours of travel time per month for some of these people at highway speeds. You'll get to the point with such large geographic areas that you find no efficiency, in administration especially, because a large portion of their time is going to be spent on the road.

And so now I realize, and we both agree and we have agreed in this House and I'll still agree totally that there is definitely a lot of amalgamation that has to take place on the school divisions. But to set a one-size cookie cutter, one size fits all, and say they have to be 5,000 in population and the task force is going to draw it up, really I think was going to run into a pile of opposition. Now as I said, I'm certainly glad to hear that there has been some relaxing of that.

Has the minister thought of relaxing the moratorium on school closures? Because there is a line further on this letter, not just talking about the geographic issues of making their school division much larger, but it says:

In addition to the 1 per cent increase in the PST has had an effect on our budget and the moratorium on school closures has also tied our hands. On May 11 we made a decision to close the school effective June 30, 2006, after grave reductions in September of 2005. Should we be allowed to close the school as planned, the school will have 17 students from K to 5.

You know, and now there is a moratorium. So what the school division is saying, they've gone through amalgamation twice over the last couple of years. They've reached a geographic size that it's getting hard to manage. Any larger would be practically impossible. They're being hit with a PST increase and now they're having their hands tied with a school closure.

You have to realize that this school division certainly isn't anti-amalgamation. It's gone through the process. It's anti, I guess, government on some of the things that you've gone forward and done.

So I guess I would ask the minister for his response on that, and one other question in that. Will the task force being coming through with any interim map? I believe the date that you had set was November of this year to have a map finalized. Will there be an interim map? And if the date is November, and they will have an interim map, I would question what is the time available for consultation from these divisions?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Well I appreciate these numerous questions and issues that the member raises. When I made the announcement, one of the reasons we had purposely decided to announce that we would structure a task force was to undertake consultation, was to have the task force at some arm's-length from the minister, to be able to go out and talk to various school boards about what they thought would fit together well.

We had said in that that we wanted to make sure we respected previous amalgamations where work has been done. I think it's difficult to come in and then undo it or to move it in a different direction. But that we wanted to make sure that the task force had an opportunity to talk with local divisions about what was workable in their regard.

Now as we talked about the threshold number of 5,000 students per division, we still believe that that is the benchmark. That is the most reasonable number. Now realistically that may mean one division is not in one of the new and larger ones; it maybe moves into the neighbouring one. That could shift 500 students. We want to be flexible as to what that looks like.

Certainly some of these divisions are going to be very large; there is no doubt about that. But this is the 21st century. We have an opportunity to have more modern communication mechanisms. I think people have come to understand that we need to reduce overhead to make sure that expenditures that are raised for student education in fact are spent on instruction and student education. In many cases where we can collapse four or five or six boards into one and reduce accordingly the number of district offices, there's bound to be some saving.

Now if the member wants to characterize that as us having softened our response, so be it. Then tonight is time well-spent. However the general principles that we've laid out — that the

task force will go and consult, that they will meet with local school divisions to talk about what they see, that they will look to develop a map that has divisions of a sustainable size of around 5,000 students, that they should do so in a way that respects previous amalgamations, that with some exception they should do so by moving whole districts into new areas.

Now there are some areas that I have certainly become aware of and was aware of before this, that there's always some debate as to whether it should be in one division or another. I can think of the situation with Lang and Milestone, as an example, who of course have lobbied heavily to move over into Thunder Creek. Maybe they should go where Thunder Creek goes, rather than with the Weyburn division. That's something the school division will have to look at.

I think there's another set of issues that will need to be discussed around Sask Valley and how that reconfigures with Saskatoon as to whether the bedroom communities or so-called bedroom communities of Martensville, Warman maybe should move into the Saskatoon district. That's something again that I think that the task force will need to look at.

But in terms of the perimeters that we've outlined and I outlined on May 13, they all remain in place today. If there is a better understanding of the flexibility that was built into it, so be it, and I'm pleased to hear that. I think that this will encourage divisions to come forward and find the support there.

All that being said, I think that we need to understand that this is going to be a difficult process that is going to require a great deal of co-operation, a great deal of support and innovation at a local level.

And from the divisions that I've talked to, even those who are resistant to the idea of needing to amalgamate, I do believe that they'll rise to the challenge and that they'll accept it. And I'm convinced that they will come to the table and participate in a way that looks after who they're most concerned with, and that's obviously the children in the system that they're responsible for.

I don't want to engage tonight in a reading back and forth of letters. I have received, as the member can expect and appreciate, a large number of letters on both sides of this. I've received letters chastising me . . . from the school divisions, chastising the school board associations, some chastising me for the approach, some criticizing the member opposite, as hard as that is to believe. And what we need to do, I think, is just take out of that what we can in terms of a better understanding of the challenge and move forward.

And that is in fact the direction the department's going in. I am pleased to say that the task force is moving forward. And indeed in time, in the next couple of months, we will see the restructuring coordinating committee appointed to deal with some of the meatier issues.

The final issue that the member asked me about was the question of an interim map. As I understand the process . . . And the committee is in fact meeting this week to talk about their process, the task force is. They are looking at this time, as I understand it, to begin consultations on a regional basis,

meeting with school divisions about what their concerns are, and how they think they might be able to come together to get a better feel as to what divisions may be better amalgamated.

There is a possibility . . . I don't think they've decided yet whether they want to produce an interim map or not. It's an issue that I would leave to the task force based largely on their consultation. If they saw fit to provide me with a map in October or to make that public . . . or in September, whenever . . . at what point they get to that we would certainly be amenable to that. In fact there could be some benefit to having that out there.

I have no doubt that there will be a certain shock value to the map when people see it. But what we've set out are a set of principles that I believe are firm and strong and I think will help guide this process, and in that regard we are now at a point where we are managing the process.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think . . . you know you started by talking a little bit about the 5,000 threshold and some may be less and some may be more. I maybe would not argue the fact that in an ideal world 5,000 students per school division is the right number to have. But I would argue that with the geographic constraints that we have, the lack of population in some of our areas of our province, it's just not practical. And I think you'd find any sort of efficiencies that you are trying to gain you would soon lose because of the sheer expanse of that specific division.

I would suggest that an interim map would be very useful. It would be quite interesting to see an interim map for school divisions because if you only come out with a final map, as you said, the shock value of seeing what this province will look like, what the governance will look like of school divisions, and the number of school divisions will be quite a shock. And I would suggest that if the task force could come forward with an interim map prior and then go back out for some more consultations, because there will be some things on that interim map that just won't make sense — just as there will be if it was a final map.

And to give school boards the ability then to get in touch with the task force and explain the rationale why some things that this interim map was put together, that don't make sense, and give the school boards and opportunity to explain that. Not unlike the boundary map of the constituencies came out with a interim map, then organizations and constituency associations were given the ability to talk to that task force and make some changes. And there were some changes made. Not significant, I don't think, but there were changes made that made sense.

And to not have that opportunity or ability for school divisions . . . school boards, I should say, and other interested parties, to make representation after they see the initial shock of the interim map, before they see the final map . . . So I would suggest that would be very useful.

I was also interested to hear the minister say that splitting up already amalgamated divisions is not out of the mandate of the task force. In other words, there may be some amalgamated divisions that have gone through the process that will be split up. Would that be true? Is that a fair assumption?



**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — To answer the last point first, I think it is unlikely that we would see that.

I am aware of one division that came to my attention today where I'm told it has recently — of course it has recently amalgamated — where they may want to look at some changes, depending on which direction the larger amalgamation takes affect. They may feel that some of the communities are better served by the neighbouring board. In those cases, the task force probably should look at it.

What we are reluctant to see the task force start to get into is questioning the value of the amalgamations that have already taken on. In these cases, some of these divisions are only a few years old. I think it is beneficial to largely leave those intact — add on to them, fine, but rather than break them back up and start over again.

So there may be some exceptions where those divisions would see changes, where they made petition for them, and so be it. But I would think that would be the exception.

With respect to the number of school divisions . . . and let me speak in particular about the geographic size. I was initially inclined, as I think we all are, inclined to believe that geography of course can be a significant issue in our province, which is very large, and can be an issue in terms of the size of divisions as we make them.

And I believed this until I became the Minister of Learning and had an opportunity to look at the Northern Lights School Division, which is responsible for education in almost fully one-half of this province — one division. I can tell the member — and it won't surprise him as I'm sure he's read local papers — sharp criticism I've received in *The Northerner*, where the editor had written an editorial chastising me for not amalgamating in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Creighton in with that school division, arguing in fact that this is the 21st century; surely we can find ways to do that without needing to maintain all this local control. Simply pool the assessment all together and move forward.

If that's a view which is prevalent in the northern half of this province that does not have, in many cases, roads that link up the individual communities, why is that not the view of the southern half of the province, that we can accommodate bigger districts?

And I think we need to really seriously think about that, as we think about how we govern ourselves. Certainly one of the announcements that I made, and we will move forward with, is to engage communities and a new local model of accountability. You still need to have that sort of accountability at the school level. And in fact I would argue that we need to make it stronger there, as opposed to worrying about the number of division boards that we have.

(22:15)

There are some who say that the 5,000 number is too large. I received an e-mail this morning from a parent in Grand Coulee who was arguing we should not abolish the board there, that the board should not be amalgamated in. And in fact this board

which is responsible for a school of about — what is it? — 80, 77, 78 students is just the perfect size.

I can appreciate that sentiment, but the fact is that we have fully one-third of the province educated in just four divisions: the Catholic and the public division in Saskatoon, and the Catholic and the public division in Regina. As far as I can tell, those students and those ratepayers are well represented by the mechanisms they have in place. So I'm not suggesting a one size fits all. What I am saying though is everybody needs to take a look at how we can move the system forward in a way that certainly maintains local accountability, but maybe doesn't do that by having a school division attached to it, that certainly has larger divisions but takes into account that this is the modern age and we have new ways to communicate and does that.

And I certainly as minister have been mindful of this and have learned a great deal over the last several weeks, as people have responded and sometimes very glowing ways about what we're doing and sometimes very harsh criticism. And what we're trying to do is to build a system that takes into account local need and local accountability on that.

The other issue that the member raised was the question about the moratorium on school closures. And I didn't answer that the previous time, and I'd like to address that now. When we announced the moratorium, we did so recognizing that it was in fact a responsibility of the local boards who make the final decision about school closure. The minister does not have legislative authority to stop the closure of any school in this province today. That is a decision which is either taken by the boards and is followed through that way. I have asked individual boards who were looking at closures to bear in mind there will be changes coming and that they may have additional resources available at their disposal.

What the member has alluded to, and I think is quite right, is that in some cases it's not a question of money. It is a question of the sustainable size of the school. Where we have schools, particularly those that are under 100 students, between the 50 and 100, and are relatively close by to another school in the same situation, where they may feel that by creating one school with more than 100 students they've got better educational programming; they can get rid of double and triple class grading, that we can in fact develop a better instructional program. This is a . . . These are difficult ones to deal with. And I can think of two examples to date where the boards are on opposite sides of the moratorium. One is in the York area where I know that they're looking at one school that is small, and they're thinking about whether it's better dealt with through amalgamation with the neighbouring one.

Of course the member for Biggar has raised in this Assembly the concern about the school at Radisson where there is a debate by the Saskatoon West division as to whether Radisson and Borden should be amalgamated into one school.

In the case of York, in the case of Regina, I can tell you that those divisions have lobbied to be exempted out of the moratorium, believing that they should be allowed to pursue the school closures. Conversely, the community of Radisson has lobbied heavily to be included in it.

What we have done is set out what I think is a reasonable approach for the boards to follow, which is that they should be mindful of where they are going to see amalgamation, particularly with more wealthy divisions whether that gives them increased fiscal capacity to keep those schools open. If however those are driven by other decisions, I think we'll need to take a look at that in time.

Indeed it is entirely possible that some divisions will not be affected by amalgamation, and we may know that by the time the interim map comes out, in which case it would make little sense to me to hold them for two more years on a no-closure moratorium. If they're not affected, if the reason we're doing this is to provide some breathing space to get a better understanding of what the resources are if they're not affected, then I think they could put forward a compelling argument to be exempted out.

The member may accuse me again of softening up my approach on this. Indeed I think what we're trying to do is just respond to the local need, and we'll take a look at it on a case-by-case basis.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Well you know I don't know if it's an accusation, softening his position, because I would be in agreement of the moves that they're making, and they're not quite as rigid.

My concern though . . . and I don't want to go on to this moratorium much longer. I do have one more point that I wanted to make because really it's not the big picture issue that amalgamation is. But the one thing that I will say about a moratorium is that, as I said before, school divisions never get to the point of closing a school lightly. And they go through a whole pile of head scratching and I'm sure some sleepless nights dealing with a school closure. As I say I've been at division meetings where the poor board members are struggling with it. And what you've done now is given the community just another arrow in their quiver to shoot at the school board. As if it wasn't hard enough for the school board, you've given them another arrow.

And you know, I know what will happen out there. You'll have some parent groups saying, you really, really don't like us now because the government is saying you don't have to close us. And the board is saying, maybe you're right; we don't have to close you. But all the stars are lined up; it makes sense to close it.

And you know, it's just going to be that much harder for board members. As if the decision wasn't hard enough as it was, now they're going to get shot with another arrow that quite frankly isn't going to do them any good. But regardless of that, we'll leave that moratorium on the side.

I was interested — I only have a couple more questions here, so bear with me — I was interested when you were saying about the local boards and making sure schools themselves have local boards that have more power, that are stronger representative of that school.

Could you give me some sort of snapshot of what you see this local board . . . what other responsibilities you see these local

boards having? And if — the second part to that question — if it won't be a bit of a competition . . . not competition, but be locking heads sometimes with an elected board, elected division board, when it makes decisions. You've got a local school board now with more authority that may be butting heads with a elected greater school board. Do you not see there being some conflict there?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — With respect to the question on moratorium again, I do appreciate the comments of the member opposite. And I would certainly encourage to adopt the member for Biggar in this session and try and help him explain this position as to the approach the boards go through.

What I have said to the boards, and we have communicated through the regional director to Saskatoon West in the case of Radisson, is that they need to be mindful that change may increase their fiscal capacity to keep schools open. That doesn't mean that that is the only factor, and I agree fully with the member opposite that in many cases it is better to see that amalgamation.

I can point to a situation in my constituency. This is not a phenomena which is limited only to rural areas. Indeed we have faced a school closure. I have gone through that in my own neighbourhood where the school board decided they wanted to put two schools together and make one stronger one. There's still a lot of hard feelings over that, and that's six years after the fact. But it has, I think, generally benefited the students and benefited the system.

So boards obviously take this into account. What we wanted to make sure is that they kept in mind that this may change, in some of those cases, the fiscal resources available. And I think in particular about schools that are in the remote south, like Alida— which is a very small school, I think only probably fewer than 30 students in it — that may in fact be in a better position to stay open as a result of increased resources being moved into instruction. I don't know that for sure; this is something the board will need to take a look at.

But there's — as we've gone through before — obviously going to be a number of closures and we understand that. Yes, it does give parents another opportunity, but frankly I'm of the view that it doesn't hurt to have that level of scrutiny. Senior levels of government have that. I can tell you I have that here. I think that we have a very open process to debate these issues on the floor, and I think that that doesn't hurt for other levels of government to have that level of scrutiny also and that chance to have a second thought about what the program is they're undertaking. If there's merit to the argument, it'll proceed and I believe that that will win the day.

With respect to the question of local school councils — this is, I think, going to be one of the most interesting pieces of the reforms that we introduce and may very well be the piece that best defines Saskatchewan's new school system in a way that will provide an increased role for parents and teachers, helping agencies, for ratepayers, to come together to have more say in the functioning of the schools.

Now some people say we should base it on the model of the school councils. Some say it should be based on the model of

the local boards. Others have suggested they should come together as a community planning council. Some have suggested it should be directly elected. Others have suggested it should be appointed by the parent board.

I have not yet decided which model I favour. I have in my mind a general idea as to the form that I want and the . . . I can see the merit of bringing together these different interests around in order to strengthen the board, particularly bringing in helping agencies around a School<sup>PLUS</sup>-type model. Whether that board is directly elected or whether that is appointed by the division board is an issue that we need to have more discussion about, and it's one that certainly I would welcome input in from stakeholders and certainly from the School Boards Association before coming to rest on one final model.

I do however think that whatever model it is that we come to, that we should look to enshrine it in legislation, that we should clearly articulate what its powers are, what its responsibilities are, to help minimize the conflict between varying levels.

At the end of this, I believe that we are still best served by a school system that are focused on schools and classrooms, parents and teachers, and kids, that are mindful that there's a relationship with the ratepayers but also welcomes in the advice of other helping agencies. And that is, in a large part, what has shaped our vision around School<sup>PLUS</sup> and I think provides us with that opportunity to move forward in terms of these new School<sup>PLUS</sup> councils or whatever it is we may call them.

So this is something that we'll have some time to debate. I am keen to make sure that this is in place before we move to the larger districts so that there's a clear understanding of how communities will relate to those schools. And I must say I am looking for a model that works as well in urban areas as it does in rural ones because, as an urban representative, I worry that even in our cities that the communities are not as well connected to schools as they should be. And so I think there's an opportunity here for us to find a model built on community schools, built on School<sup>PLUS</sup> and really strengthens and finds a new role for parents and teachers in that system.

**Mr. McMorris:** — One last question, I think, depending on how the answer comes, so be careful on how you answer . . . is regarding on the governance. And I know from again the school divisions that have amalgamated that the governance and how they set up . . . whether it's a ten-member board or an eight-member board or however that works. That is extremely important to making an amalgamation work and fit together.

And I can think of a division — and you touched on two of the schools, Lang and Milestone, well that's kind of in my area — where Prairie View amalgamated with Weyburn and that was one of the biggest issues . . . is the makeup of the governance of the school board.

And so I guess my question would be, when the map will be drawn, will they also draw up how the governance will be structured, how many board members there will be on each division? Because certainly I can see a benefit of getting to a point where there is a board member for four or five schools, so he's seeing the whole division as opposed to . . . so often there is a division member per school and that is . . . their whole issue

is their own school as opposed to looking at the betterment of education in the whole division.

So could you explain to me what you foresee as far as the governance and the makeup of school boards? And also can we be assured, and I think I know the . . . but we can be assured that those board members will still be elected, and there won't be people appointed from the department on these different school boards?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed the education equity task force will come back with the boundaries for the new subdivisions. So they will come forward with that at the same time, and we'll have an opportunity to look at it. I'm told that we are looking at a maximum of 10 members per board.

(22:30)

In some of these we may want to take a look, depending on the geographic areas and the number of boards that are being amalgamated in, as to whether that is the appropriate number or whether we want to go larger, slightly larger. I can assure the member that these boards will be fully elected.

One of the things that I heard as I travelled the province was that they wanted very clearly to maintain the ability for boards to raise their own funds and to remain elected. And that is one of the reasons we rejected the Alberta model and opted for this one.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Well that's reassuring, and I guess that was the answer I was looking for so I have no more questions. But I would like to thank the minister and his officials for being here. My member from Arm River-Watrous has a couple of questions, and then we'll wrap it up.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Arm River-Watrous.

**Mr. Brkich:** — They are very quick questions. They are just with the information that I received today from you on the pay scale or the pay grid change. On the instructors, how many were affected by the grid change of instructors?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed all the instructors were affected by this change and will be placed into an appropriate step and category within the grid. Although that hasn't happened, so I am not able to give the member tonight the number by category which we would normally be able to provide. But I can assure him and advise him that indeed every member of the academic unit is affected by this and will be placed into the new grid.

**Mr. Brkich:** — If you could provide that with us as soon as possible I would be interested in that. One of the questions I guess I'll ask you is . . . the government always said this year there would be zero increase. But is that how you . . . it looks like they got around that zero increase was adjusting . . . each instructor got a pay grid . . . can you give me an average of what their pay would go up? Would you know? Would it be 2 per cent, 3 per cent?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — It is difficult in this case to average. The academic unit is different than the academic support unit in

that it had not yet received its pay equity money. And the last time we were discussing these estimates, I explained that one of the difficulties with dealing with the pay equity for SIAST is that there is not an obvious male wage line to bring into it.

And so the result was to restructure this more to base it on a credentialized basis. As such there are changes. I can't tell the member what an average increase would be. Some will be significant as the pay equity is applied. Others will be relatively small. But once you separate out the pay equity money, you still end up with the 0, 1, and 1 in terms of the overall change. Plus then pay equities apply.

So this is a bit of a complicated one because it had not yet had to pay equity monies brought in, and there was no obvious male wage line to bring into it.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I would be . . . I'd be asking, would be 2,000 a month, along that line.

But one of the other questions I would ask is: why would you have brought in each instructor a different pay grid? Basically that's . . . I don't think . . . I don't know if it was the union asking for that to begin with, or is that something that was brought in from the government?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This was the fundamental change that happened with this particular set of negotiations. This was a request by the union to move to a credentialized basis. So instead of every welding instructor being paid the same as the welding instructor, it recognized the number of years that they had in terms of post-secondary education. This was a request that they made.

It did complicate the negotiations. And obviously when you start with a brand new grid system, you're going to end up with a certain amount of debate. But this was what we were advised by SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union), they favoured. And from a perspective of management, it was workable, and as such it was agreed to.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Is this going to affect the current budget for the education? Can you give me a dollar figure of a gross amount of what's going to be paid out this year?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — SIAST will draw down its reserves this year to meet its demands. There is some impact, I understand, about the range of 1 million, a million and a half — I'm told more precisely, I guess 1.6 million — in terms of impact that they'll draw down on the reserves. And we will re-base their budget next year to deal with that.

But in terms of the approach that is . . . what was agreed on and it seemed workable.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Chair. And I want to thank again the officials for being here so late into the night. We really appreciate that and answering the few questions.

It will certainly be interesting as the map — the map — comes

forward in November, that we will have a fall session to scrutinize that map in. So we look forward to having opportunities in November to ask more questions. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I too would like to . . . I'd like to thank the officials for their time. They've been very helpful. As a new minister, this has been a great opportunity to get to see the way that this department works. And I can see why so many members clamour to be the Minister of Learning.

I'd also like to thank the members opposite for their questions.

And I just want to reiterate; I guess I did promise the map would be here November 15, not December 15, but maybe I'm flexible on that too so . . . No, okay, it'll be November 15. With that, thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay subvote (LR01) for 5,718,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR01) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay. Subvote accommodation and central services (LR02) for 6,230,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR02) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Subvote post-secondary education (LR11) for 387,917. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Oh, 387 million, pardon me.

Subvote (LR11) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Subvote early childhood development (LR08) for 3,320,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR08) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Subvote K-12 education (LR03) for 578,771,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR03) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Subvote training programs (LR12), 37,526,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR12) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Subvote student support programs (LR13) for 71,271,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR13) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Provincial Library (LR15) for 8,529,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR15) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Teachers' pensions and benefits (LR04) for 119,123,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Subvote (LR04) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Amortization of capital assets. Are there any questions? Okay.

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums, \$1,119,385,000.

Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

Vote 5 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund  
Lending and Investing Activities  
Learning  
Vote 169**

**The Deputy Chair:** — Next item of business, page 146, Learning, vote 169, loans to student aid (SA01), 66,000,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay.

Subvote (SA01) agreed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** —

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums, \$66,000,000.

Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay, carried.

Vote 169 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund  
Lending and Investing Activities  
Education Infrastructure Financing Corporation**

**Vote 170**

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay, final business. Statutory question, Education Infrastructure Financing Corporation loans (ED01) for 3,900,000. Are there any questions?

**An Hon. Member:** — No.

Subvote (ED01) — Statutory.

Vote 170 — Statutory.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Okay. That concludes the estimates for the Department of Learning. I recognize the Deputy House Leader.

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

**The Deputy Chair:** — It has been moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Carried.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I recognize the fine Deputy Chair of committees.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — When shall the committee sit again? I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — It being now past 10:30, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow. Have a pleasant evening.

The Assembly adjourned at 22:42.



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