



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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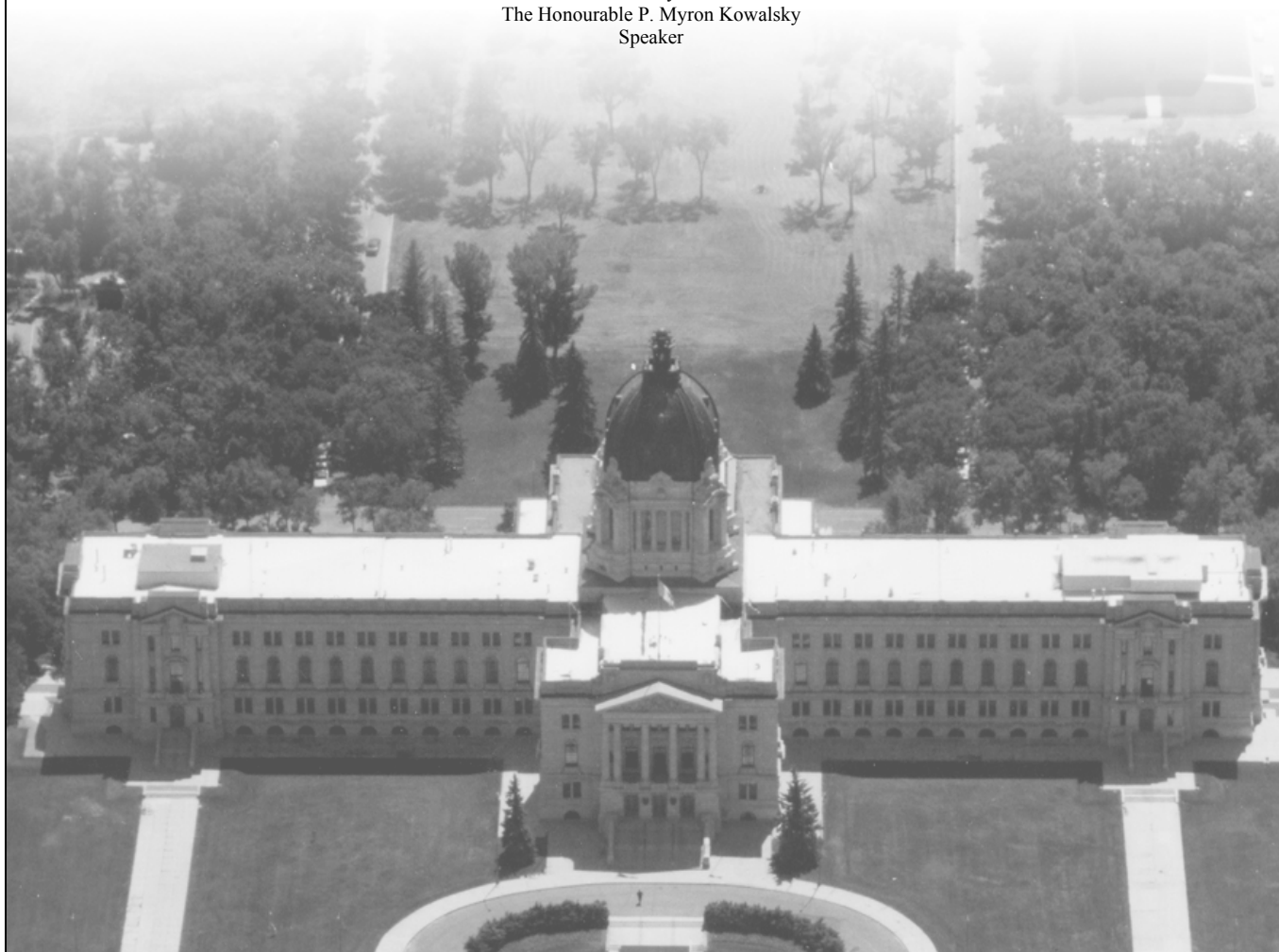
**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(HANSARD)

Published under the  
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky  
Speaker



**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN**

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

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

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Cypress Hills.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition of a different sort today, concerned with SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] ... [inaudible] ... for school divisions. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take all necessary action to reverse charges recently made that require the education sector to contribute to the cost of SAMA, as this added burden for school boards will ultimately lead to higher property taxes for Saskatchewan residents.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by constituents from the community of Frontier. I so present.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise again today on behalf of people who are concerned about the horrible drug, crystal meth:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to implement a strategy that will deal with crystal methamphetamine, the education, prevention, enforcement, and treatment.

The people that have signed this petition are from Aberdeen and Vonda. I so present.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another petition signed by people concerned about the forced amalgamation of school divisions that is proposed by the NDP [New Democratic Party] government. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

Mr. Speaker, a number of signatures on this petition and they are all from the community of Elrose. I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the forced amalgamation of school divisions. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals all from the community of Briercrest. I so present.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today with a petition regarding the forced amalgamation of school divisions:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by residents of Tribune, Oungre, and Bromhead. I so present. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Arm River-Watrous.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens who are quite concerned with crop insurance premium hikes and also the coverage reductions:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Bladworth and Kenaston. I so present.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition from citizens opposed to possible reductions of health care services in Biggar. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Biggar Hospital, long-term care home, and ambulance service is maintained at the very least their current level of services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

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

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Swift Current.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of constituents concerned about the deficiency in residential support for southwest Saskatchewan residents who have long-term disabilities. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to provide the funding required for additional residential spaces for Swift Current residents with lifelong disabilities.

And, Mr. Speaker, a number of petitions today, all of the petitioners from the city of Swift Current, save one from Cadillac. I so present.

#### READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

**Deputy Clerk:** — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 14 are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 180, 637, 640, 715, 716, 720, and 730.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce in your gallery Cindy Zerr. I'll get Cindy to stand up. Now Cindy is the mother of Arielle Zerr who is one of our Pages. And when I asked her what does your mom do, or what does she do, you know what could I say about her, she said oh, she's my mom. So there you go, you firmly established yourself in that niche.

So I'd like everyone to join me in welcoming Cindy, Arielle's mom, here today. Thanks.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Nutana, the Minister for Public Service Commission.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today in your gallery are 25 public servants that have spent the morning at the legislature touring the building and meeting with the Legislative Library people as well as receiving a briefing on the legislative process. As well I understand that they had a tour of the cabinet room. They represent a number of public servants from various government departments such as Health, DCRE [Department of Community Resources and Employment], Environment, Highways, Ag and Food, the Public Service Commission, Finance, Industry and Resources, and the Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, they will be meeting with the Minister of Labour following question period. I hope they enjoy the proceedings this afternoon, and I would ask all members of the legislature to welcome these 25 public servants to the Legislative Assembly.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with the minister in welcoming the public service members here this afternoon. And I have the great fortune to meet with you after you meet with the Minister of Labour, and I look forward to that.

It certainly is, I think, a very wonderful outreach program for this Assembly to invite our public servants into the legislature to see how the Chamber works and how the legislature itself works, and I look forward to meeting with these folks this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some guests here from the great country of Korea who are studying at the University of Regina, and they are accompanied by Pam, one of our Pages.

So I would ask Jung and Lee if they would wave, and we will acknowledge them and welcome them here to the Assembly, please.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Elphinstone.

**Mr. McCall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly two young women seated in the Speaker's gallery. They are Katie Westendorp and Sarah Yaremchuk, if you could please stand and give us a wave.

Sarah is in this year's graduating class from Martin high school, and Katie is an aspiring actress. And it's my understanding that they are from the fine riding of Regina Elphinstone-Centre, but they're not here to visit their MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. They're here to visit their friend, Jonathan

Moscoso, one of our Pages. So maybe we can catch up later. Anyway, please welcome them to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow.

**Hon. Ms. Higgins:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great deal of pleasure, I introduce to you and through you to all members of the House someone sitting in the west gallery: Lily Olson who has been a friend for a few years.

Now I was trying to decide how to introduce Lily. She wears many hats, is involved in many groups. Last I heard, she's still a GSU [Grain Services Union] member, on leave working for the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress]. But like I say, Mr. Speaker, she wears many hats and carries many torches and does a great deal for the community and Saskatchewan as a whole. And I would like to welcome her here and hope all my members will join with me.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

#### Saskatchewan Centenarians

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about two Saskatchewan centenarians who hail from the Rosetown area. Alta Johnston was born in a covered wagon near Barnes, Okalahoma on December 5, 1902 when her family was making their way to Canada.

She married Wilson Johnston in 1928, and they farmed in the community of Zealandia near Rosetown. She currently resides in Saskatoon so her sons, Wendel and Bill, were pleased to receive the centennial medallion and certificate on her behalf.

Ivy Hunt was born in Winnington county of York in England on March 31, 1905 and just turned 100 years last month. She came to Canada with her parents on a cattle boat in 1906. In 1907, the family moved to Saskatchewan, and Ivy resided in Regina, Kenaston, Kindersley, Forgan, Saskatoon, and Glamis.

In 1928, she married Forrest Hunt and they began farming in the Sovereign area near Rosetown. They raised a son, Douglas, and a daughter, Valeda. In 1972 they retired to a home in Rosetown where Ivy lived until 1996, when she moved into McNab Place. She currently resides at the Biggar Diamond Lodge.

Family and friends joined with Ivy Hunt to celebrate her birthday with a party that included skits, songs, and food, as well as a presentation of her centennial medallion and certificate. The highlight of the day for me was watching Ivy, who loves music, singing with her two remaining sisters at the party.

Congratulations to Ivy Hunt and Alta Johnston, Saskatchewan

centenarians from Rosetown in this our centennial year.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Athabasca.

#### Youth Means Business Workshop

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Beaver River Community Futures Development Corporation, located in Beauval in my constituency of Athabasca, recently held a one-day workshop in Meadow Lake to raise the awareness of youth entrepreneurs amongst northern students.

Mr. Speaker, Youth Means Business was the theme for the day and it certainly rang true as ambitious young people from almost every community and First Nations in the Northwest attended a conference where they watched three presentations on combining creativity with entrepreneurship.

Mr. Speaker, Monica Coneys, a former resident of South Africa who now lives in Saskatoon, was one such presenter. She told students how she used music, drumming, and dance to encourage teamwork. The second presenter, Renee Bouvier, created a structure out of spaghetti and gummi bears to encourage team co-operation and problem solving, Mr. Speaker. Finally, students also heard from Lee Bell of Meadow Lake, who started a recording studio and explained the process of creating a CD [compact disc].

Mr. Speaker, this workshop emphasized the importance of northern communities working together and showed students that entrepreneurship can be exciting and creative, and there's all different ways of making a living in their hometown.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all my colleagues will join in me in acknowledging the Beaver River Community Futures Development Corporation for hosting this very important conference and exposing our young people in the North to innovative ways of doing business. Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

#### Centenarians Awarded Centennial Medals

**Mr. Gantefer:** — In recent weeks I've had the honour and privilege of visiting with three special ladies and their families. I met with each of these women to present them with the Saskatchewan centennial medals to honour them as Saskatchewan centenarians in our province's 100th year.

Mr. Speaker and members, I very much enjoyed the opportunity on behalf of my constituency and our province to thank and recognize the special people who make this province work — people like Belle Harley, Nettie Rolph, and Katie Stewart, each with over 100 years of experience, each with amazing stories to share.

Their stories are of courage, strength, and hard work. They have

endured personal hardships, achieved personal victories and accomplishments. They have contributed to their families and communities. Each in their own way helped to build our province into what it is today.

Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I ask members of the legislature to join with me in recognizing and honouring our Melfort constituency centenarians — Belle Harley, Nettie Rolph, and Katie Stewart.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

[13:45]

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

### Centennial Peace Legacy

**Ms. Morin:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Centennial 2005 Peace Project engages the province's young people through various forms of art and activities in promoting a peaceful and compassionate environment in schools, communities, and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 300 students from the Grant Road and Kitchener public schools in Regina are creating a culture of respect and understanding to mark the province's centennial year. This peace project, Mr. Speaker, is an expansion of Hear the Children Peace Day event that was founded by SaskEnergy in 1998 in Saskatoon.

In 2003 the Canadian Red Cross in Saskatchewan began hosting the event as part of its educational programming. And now, Mr. Speaker, to build on the success of this initiative, two more Hear the Children Peace Day events will be held in the province in September of this year, one in Regina and the other in Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, through art projects, peace poles, and virtual diaries, this project provides our young people with an opportunity to become involved in the centennial celebrations while empowering them with a sense of responsibility about the role they play in shaping the future of our province and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing SaskEnergy and the Red Cross for their commitment to Hear the Children Peace Day events and in commending our young people from the Grant Road and Kitchener public schools for taking a leadership role that will build a legacy of peace throughout Saskatchewan and bring ongoing benefits to us all. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Arm River-Watrous.

### Watrous Resident Named Citizen of the Year

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about a remarkable constituent from Watrous.

On March 23, at the Watrous Civic Centre, friends and family gathered to honour Mr. Ervin Gross who was named 2004 Citizen of the Year. Mr. Gross was born in the Simpson district in 1940 and later, in 1954, his family moved to Watrous, the community where he has lived ever since.

In 1962 Ervin purchased a local barbershop, which has now become the longest run, single ownership business in Watrous. Mr. Gross's continuous generosity around his community has earned him a great level of respect over the years. He was also a travelling barber, making house calls as well as hospital calls to all those unable to attend his shop. He has made many trips to Saskatoon, Young, and Liberty, as well as monthly visits to the Mandall House and Manitou Lodge to deliver his services there and spread some good cheer amongst the residents.

Ervin is a diehard Montreal Canadiens fan — a man after my own heart — and a strong supporter of the Watrous Winterhawks, a team he played on as goaltender for 25 years. He rarely misses a Winterhawks game and each year he and his wife Carol present the Reg Preston Memorial Trophy to the most deserving player on the Winterhawks team.

Ervin also spent many years on local council, first on Watrous Town Council from '78 to 1988, and later on Manitou Beach council from 1993 to 2001. He sat on many committees and still is an active member of the Manitou Beach Recreation Board where his long record of volunteer community service continues.

I would ask that all members join me congratulating a true pillar of the Watrous community, Mr. Ervin Gross. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Centre.

### Mortlach Commemorates *Empress of Ireland* Disaster

**Hon. Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the pleasure of attending a service of remembrance in Mortlach, my hometown, to honour Edith Hart and four family members lost in the *Empress of Ireland* maritime disaster of 1914. Edith's parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Hart, also died in the tragedy, as did infant and brother William Hart and John Scott.

On display this past weekend at the Mortlach community hall, Mr. Speaker, were the *Empress of Ireland* artifacts and Mortlach Village Council minutes expressing sympathy to the families of the local people who perished.

Historian and retired teacher Marion Kelch was showing the artifacts to students and the public. As well, Mr. Speaker, Rob Rondeau, formerly of Rosetown and now a professional diver who was instrumental in the recovery process, was also present.

Mr. Speaker, the *Empress of Ireland* was the class of the Liverpool-Quebec City route which brought 117,000 passengers to Canada. An estimated 80,000 of those passengers settled in the Prairies. Today, Mr. Speaker, there are almost 400,000 residents in Western Canada who can trace their roots back to

the journeys of the *Empress*.

On that fateful evening of May 29, 1914, 26 Saskatchewan residents aboard the *Empress* perished. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today in the year of our centennial and recognize this very important part of Saskatchewan history. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Moosomin.

### Rocanville Tigers Win Championship

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Wednesday evening, March 30 was a very special time for the community of Rocanville and in particular their favourite senior hockey team, the Rocanville Tigers. Mr. Speaker, it was on that evening that they captured the Triangle Hockey League championship for 2005. As Allan Reavie, the coach, says, "It was a great moment for the Tigers who had not won a league championship since 1981." And he says, "It's the goal every year to win the championship . . . and to win it in four straight is just huge."

Mr. Speaker, when Rocanville went into the final series they felt they were in for a real significant battle because they were taking on the Ochapowace Thunder, who had just defeated the Esterhazy Flyers, who were the league champions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, teams like the Rocanville Tigers or Esterhazy or Ochapowace, these individuals are the people who really create excitement in our communities during the winter months. And many people take the time to go and support senior hockey but, Mr. Speaker, this would not happen if it were not for all the volunteers who give of their time and support their local communities, their rinks.

And so at this time I would like to say hats off to the Rocanville Tigers, Triangle League hockey league champions for this year. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

### ORAL QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

### Revenue-Sharing Agreement with Municipalities

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, first it was Regina with the 4 per cent hike in property taxes. My own hometown of Swift Current's announced a tax increase. Saskatoon's talking about a 4.8 per cent tax hike. Mr. Speaker, Yorkton, Yorkton has now confirmed a 4 per cent tax hike for its property owners.

Mr. Speaker, indirectly but to be sure, this government is picking the pockets of property taxpayers in the province of

Saskatchewan while they sit on record revenues from the resource sector. Mr. Speaker, homeowners across Canada need . . . across Saskatchewan need tax relief. They need a provincial government that cares about revenue sharing.

Why does this NDP government refuse to address the revenue-sharing issue for municipalities in our province?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Relations.

**Hon. Mr. Taylor:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Certainly the member of the opposition Conservative Party should be aware — because I answered this question a couple of weeks ago — that we have entered into discussions with the municipalities to address the issue of revenue sharing over the course of the next couple of months. Mr. Speaker, also I can't help but notice that just a little over a week ago in this House we had a budget vote, a budget vote that committed \$55 million to education property tax relief and the opposition voted against it.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, Yorkton Mayor Phil DeVos says his city was looking at a 10 per cent rate hike, but with a lot of work they've reduced that number. The mayor of Yorkton says there are many reasons for the increase, but fundamentally it comes down to no increase in revenue sharing from this NDP government, Mr. Speaker, including a government whose Deputy Premier represents that very community. The mayor says and I quote:

Like just about every other community in the province, we're staring down the mouth of a tiger that says increases.

Homeowners across the province — Saskatchewan families — are looking for leadership from this government with respect to revenue sharing. Why is that leadership not forthcoming?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Relations.

**Hon. Mr. Taylor:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And again, appreciate the question.

The members on this side of the House have been appreciative for quite a number of years of the work that is being done at the municipal level by municipal leaders, mayors, councillors, reeves, and councillors. These people put in a lot of time every year to meet the needs of their communities. And, Mr. Speaker, this government — just as they do at the municipal level, Mr. Speaker — this government sat down to review revenues and expenditures and the needs of the communities. We made decisions regarding choices, and, Mr. Speaker, when we looked

at what the municipalities were asking us for after they reviewed their needs and expenses, Mr. Speaker, they said we wanted infrastructure funded.

Mr. Speaker, this year we've committed \$11 million worth of brand new money to infrastructure at the request of the municipalities.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister and this government should be appreciative as to what municipalities have done because in the '90s when this government sent out the call for fiscal austerity, they phoned the municipalities. That's whose phone rang, and the budgets for municipalities, the revenue sharing was cut massively by this government.

Well now the government is sitting on significantly more revenues. The cupboard is not bare, and municipalities, mayors and councillors who report to their taxpayers are asking why the government has 50 million more dollars to invest in more SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company]. Why do they have \$72 million to lose on a BC [British Columbia] telecom — \$72 million, Mr. Speaker — and no more money for meaningful revenue sharing for property tax relief? What's wrong with the priorities of this NDP government?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Government Relations.

**Hon. Mr. Taylor:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the leader of the Conservative Saskatchewan Party recognizes and remembers some of the history that he may even have been a part of in the early 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, the urban revenue pool back in 1981-82 had increased by 10.2 per cent, and in '82-83 just prior to the change in government, it increased by 11.5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the 1980s — that revenue-sharing pool — where did it go: '85, 0 per cent; '86, 0 per cent; '88, 0 per cent, '89, 0 per cent; 1990, 0 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the last three years under this government, 18 per cent, 15 per cent, 20 per cent increases, for 54 per cent in the last three years, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

#### Funding for Centennial Celebrations

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon Optimist Club has been organizing Canada Day celebrations in that city since . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon Optimist Club has been organizing Canada Day celebrations in that city since 1971. It is one of the largest celebrations in Western Canada. This year the Optimist Club wanted not only to celebrate Canada Day but the province's centennial as well. Last fall the club applied for a centennial grant and was turned down. Brad Sylvester, the Chair of this year's celebration, was told he would not get funding as the Optimist Canada Day is an existing event.

Can the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation explain why the province denied the optimist club funding for this year's celebration?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Mr. Speaker, there is a number of events that are being planned throughout Saskatchewan. Just this morning the member from Moose Jaw North announced a provincial-wide celebration that's going to be happening. And a lot of these recommendations came from a committee of the province's people that made a number of recommendations to us in how we were going to celebrate our centennial.

And I think there's a lot of opportunities for the people of Saskatchewan to commemorate and celebrate our centennial. And I know that we can't cover all the costs, but there is opportunities for all of them to participate.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Mr. Speaker, the optimist club applied for a grant to help celebrate Saskatchewan's centennial. One of the ways they wanted to do this was through a fireworks display, but under the regulations, centennial funding cannot be used for fireworks. The optimist club was quite shocked to hear today that the province is spending almost \$1 million for a huge fireworks display in 15 different communities, but it won't provide funding for their Canada Day event.

Mr. Speaker, why the double standard? Why can some communities get funding for fireworks and others not?

[14:00]

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that we are not funding for Canada Day celebrations. And I also want to say that for our centennial year, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And I think this is a time where we want to include all of the provinces, all of the province including 15 communities, including 2 northern communities.

So I would urge the members opposite to join in in our celebrations and not be such party-poopers.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!



**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Mr. Speaker, in a letter he sent to the centennial office, Brad Sylvester speaks of direct conversations he had with the Premier at the 2004 Optimist Canada Day. Mr. Sylvester writes that the Premier talked with him about the funding for centennial events and that the Premier, quote, indicated his opinion was the province should enhance existing as opposed to inventing from scratch or at least a portion of both.

After he was turned down for funding, Mr. Sylvester wrote to the Premier to find out why, especially given their conversation last year. Can the Premier tell this Assembly why he would tell the Optimist Club of Saskatoon that he thought the province should enhance existing events when in actuality they were being turned down?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Mr. Speaker, I want to say again that there's all kinds of opportunities for the whole province and all communities to be part of our centennial celebrations. And we also have a group of, a large number of volunteers all over the province that are working hard to commemorate and celebrate our centennial. We have an independent body of people that determine, based on criteria, who gets funding for different events and legacy projects.

And I think I would urge again the members opposite to join us in our centennial year of commemorating and celebrating.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Mr. Speaker, Brad Sylvester and the Saskatoon Optimist Club are upset that the government does not have money for a free event, one that would be accessible to everyone, one of the largest celebrations in Saskatoon each summer. Mr. Sylvester writes, it is truly frustrating as an organizer of a free entertainment day in a city park to hear the province does have \$675,000 to help fund a user-pay celebration and nothing for our day.

Can the Premier explain this to the Assembly, exactly that? Why does this NDP government have money to put into an event that people have to pay to see, but refuses to provide funding to an event that is open to all citizens of Saskatoon?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Hon. Ms. Beatty:** — Mr. Speaker, there is a number of signature events that are going to be happening throughout the province, and the gala is going to be one of those. And if you look at the lineup of talent that's coming home from originally Saskatchewan residents, I think it's not expensive at all.

And there's a whole number of other events happening

throughout the province including homecomings and reunions that are going to be available to every citizen in this province, and those that are originally from Saskatchewan will be urged to come home as well. So again I would urge members opposite to join us and commemorate and celebrate because it only happens once in a lifetime opportunity for all of us.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

#### Forecasting Oil Prices

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — It's now becoming increasingly clear this . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order please, members. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now becoming increasingly clear this NDP government lowballed its forecast for oil revenues in this year's budget. No one except this NDP is predicting an oil price of under \$42 a barrel this year. In fact, just last week the International Monetary Fund sharply increased its projection to \$52.23 a barrel. Mr. Speaker, why is this NDP government lowballing the government's oil revenues?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Finance, in putting together its forecast for the budget, relies on the advice of the Department of Industry and Resources. The Department of Industry and Resources has the facts with respect to the amount of production that they anticipate in Saskatchewan during the course of the fiscal year. The department then also surveys various industry analysts and tries to establish an average price as to what their forecast will be for the coming calendar year and also the fiscal year. They then provide advice to the Department of Finance as to what they think that price will be, and it's on that basis that we then book a number and book the revenues that we see in our estimates, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the average closing price of West Texas Intermediate light crude oil over the first week of 2005-2006 is \$55.60 a barrel. As a result, this NDP government has collected, since April 1, \$11 million more in oil revenue than its own budget estimates.

My question is to the Minister of Finance. Does this NDP government intend to spend this money on teachers? Will it spend this money on hard-working nurses, or will it be wasted on bad investments and boondoggles, as has been the practice with this government?

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member should remember that we're only a week or so into the fiscal year, and when we book a price, that's for 365 days of the year. And now if the member can tell us what the figures will be for remainder of the year, then maybe he's got a point. But I don't think he can.

Which raises the question, which raises the question: how is it that he is able to say with that degree of certainty that we're lowballing prices, yet he refuses to provide to the Legislative Assembly his analysis, his process, his methodology for arriving at that conclusion? If he does have a methodology that results in a different conclusion, perhaps he would provide that methodology to the members of the Legislative Assembly, and the price of the barrel of oil that he anticipates for the year.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to present the information to the minister that he desires. I thought that him and his department would have that information. If the price of oil stays where it is today for the rest of the year, this government will have an additional \$423 million, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Romanow government . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order, please. Order. Order, please. The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Speaker, the Romanow government used to have a formula for distributing excess revenues: one-third on new spending, one-third for debt reduction, and one-third for tax reduction, Mr. Speaker. Under that formula, everyone got a share in that extra revenue when it came in. Now all we get with this NDP government is higher municipal taxes and money wasted on Navigata and Pangaea.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want tax relief. Will this NDP government commit today to follow that formula and use a portion of its extra oil revenues to reduce taxes in Saskatchewan?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, the process that we utilize to determine a price for the barrel of oil going forward is not dissimilar to the process utilized by the province of British Columbia or the province of Alberta. I believe the price for British Columbia is very similar to the price that we're establishing.

But I don't know very much about this "if" methodology, Mr. Speaker. And perhaps the member might elucidate on that little word which is such a big word — if. If oil prices stay at a certain level. What information does he have that oil prices will stay at that level, Mr. Speaker? If, if, if — that's a little word but has major consequence for the people of Saskatchewan. And on that basis he would start spending money, Mr. Speaker. We're back to the old days of Mr. Devine here.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

### Collective Bargaining with Public Sector Workers

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the NDP caucus Chair told the *Leader-Post* that a number of unions had settled outside of the 0, 1, 1 wage mandate. He said, and I quote:

If you look at some [of the] settlements and what they have achieved, then it is my belief that our settlements in the public sector have exceeded the cost of living.

The president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour agrees. The same day, Larry Hubich said:

. . . he too believes the NDP government's public sector wage mandate . . . has been breached in many contracts and is now serving no purpose other than to make bargaining more difficult.

Who are we to believe? Can the Minister of Labour tell us if it really is 0, 1, and 1, or is it what the NDP caucus Chair and what the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] president say, that the mandate has been breached and settlements have exceeded 0, 1, and 1?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now going into this bargaining process . . . and I think I've repeated this enough times that it should be fairly fixed in terms of the parameters of the bargaining process. As you know that during some years when we've had good fortune — which I remember two big bump-ups since '91 when I'd been elected — we have attempted to bring the spending line of government in line with revenues. In this past year, we adopted 0, 1, and 1 with flexibility. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to explain more about what that is.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the 0, 1, and 1 wage mandate simply doesn't fly with the public sector unions any more. Last week Larry Hubich told *The StarPhoenix* that, and I quote:

"I don't understand the strategy of sticking to this phony, ill-advised, non-supported [wage] mandate of zero, one and one" . . .

He also told the *Leader-Post* that the NDP should, and I quote, ". . . be abandoning their ill-conceived zero, one and one [mandate]."

Mr. Speaker, Larry Hubich calls this a phony mandate. The

NDP caucus Chair even agrees with that. What is the purpose of this strategy? Is it to negotiate in bad faith, or is it to create a false front for this government's backroom deals — something the Health minister admits is common practice within the NDP?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I do find this a little bit odd that we have now the Conservative Sask Party opposite trying to cast themselves as the friends of Larry Hubich and the friends of labour, but I'll just let that pass for a moment.

If the member wants to go back to the past maybe we can discuss their enthusiasm for the core services review which cuts hundreds of public servants in the provinces where it's been undertaken. They can talk about the member who talked about getting rid of the skunks in the public service, and he apparently knows where they are. And so I would just say that mandate or not, Mr. Speaker, every government goes to the bargaining table with a budget. We adopted a budget guideline with flexibility, and certainly I think we've demonstrated that flexibility at the different bargaining tables.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Mr. Speaker, what we are agreeing with and talking about is that unions are telling the NDP just how disrespectful the 0, 1, and 1 mandate is to the process of free collective bargaining. Stephen Foley of the Canadian Union of Public Employees has told the media that the NDP should have scrapped 0, 1, and 1 altogether and put unions on equal footing to do collective bargaining, Mr. Speaker. He told the *Leader-Post* last week that 0, 1, and 1, quote, "... doesn't ensure that everybody is treated fairly ..."

Mr. Speaker, we have been calling on the NDP to drop the 0, 1, and 1 mandate for some time now. The unions are doing the exact same thing. When will this government start telling public sector workers by dropping the 0, 1, and 1 wage mandate and treating them fairly?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I think we'll be happy to go head-to-head with the members of the opposition on the topic of fairness at any given time.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Let me read a couple of quotes from the member opposite at the Sask Party's convention, the "mandate for the civil service should be to go and find a real job." Or we have this other lovely quote, Mr. Speaker: offer

civil servants the opportunity to participate in the private sector.

[14:15]

And as much as I respect the private sector, I don't think that's what they had in mind, Mr. Speaker.

Now within the flexibility in our budget approach to bargaining in this last round, we've addressed health plan issues. We've addressed recruitment and retention issues. We've addressed hours of work issues, and we've addressed classification issues, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Mr. Speaker, how can anyone trust this government? This is a charade; this is a charade. Let's put the position, let's put the positions of the members opposite on the record for this so-called debate that the member wants to have.

Let's review what the Premier said. He respects collective bargaining and that the NDP would never interfere in negotiations. The Health minister, the Health minister says interfering in negotiations is common NDP practice, especially on the eve of an election. The minister responsible for public sector compensation says, zero but with flexibility. What does zero really mean then, Mr. Speaker? And the NDP caucus Chair says, the mandate is out the window, and it has been since the get-go, Mr. Speaker. When will the NDP stop using workers in this province as political pawns and give them the straight and honest goods, Mr. Speaker?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm going to approach this for a moment from a different tack seeing as we don't seem to be getting anywhere with this one.

Everybody has to construct a budget and in order to pay people, not just this year but next year and the year after and the year after that, there's an issue of financial sustainability. And the fact is that when the Minister of Finance speaks to the spending proclivities of the member opposite, he is trying to create a sustainable budget plan for government, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

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

#### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes ... Order, please. The Chair recognizes the Minister of Industry and Resources.

#### Incentives for Potash Industry

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in

Saskatoon I was pleased to announce incentives that will encourage expansion in Saskatchewan's potash industry, incentives that will have a positive impact on job opportunities and the overall wealth of our province.

Potash mining is very important to Saskatchewan. Canada leads the world in only two areas of mineral production, potash and uranium, and both industries are located right here in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's potash industry accounts for 30 per cent of world production. Our province earns over \$370 million annually through potash royalties and taxes. Over 6,000 of our citizens are employed by the potash industry directly or indirectly.

Mr. Speaker, our mining companies are good employers. Mining employees are the best paid sector of our labour force. Mining companies also are major customers to a large number of Saskatchewan suppliers, from engineering, machining, and transportation companies, to name but a few.

Here in Saskatchewan we're blessed with potash reserves that can easily supply world demand for hundreds of years. World demand for potash is growing and will continue to grow for as long as population numbers and income levels continue to rise around the world.

Saskatchewan's potash industry has significant expansion potential and we as a government want to promote this potential to its fullest. That is why we are announcing two new tax measures. First, projects that increase the productive capacity of their mines by at least 200,000 tonnes of potassium chloride per year will be eligible for a 10-year holiday from base payments. The second change is a capital investment incentive. Companies will receive a depreciation rate of 120 per cent on new capital expenditures.

Industry has responded very quickly to these changes. Potash Corp of Saskatchewan announced an investment at both its Lanigan and Allan facilities totalling \$456 million. Agrium has stated it will invest approximately \$65 million expanding its mine at Vanscoy. Mosaic announced it will further develop its Esterhazy facility with an investment up to \$210 million. Mr. Speaker, this represents over \$700 million in new capital investment, and will involve 1,700 person-years of construction work, and will create more than 230 permanent jobs.

Mr. Speaker, the projects announced today are the equivalent of two entirely new potash mines, and will increase our potash production by over 20 per cent. These measures are part of a larger plan to encourage growth in Saskatchewan's mining and petroleum industries.

In 2002 we made oil and gas drilling in Saskatchewan competitive with Alberta. In the same year we established the six-year mineral exploration incentive package. And there's an explosion of exploration activity going on in Saskatchewan, which bodes well for the future of mining in our province. In 2003 we reduced profit taxes for the potash industry and provided more favourable recognition for capital expansion.

Recently we announced incentives for encouraging enhanced oil recovery projects because it is well known, Mr. Speaker, that the key to Saskatchewan's oil resource is to improve recovery

from existing reserves and wells. Today we're making more changes.

Mining is a key cylinder in the economic engine of Saskatchewan. It is the third largest sector of our economy. We will continue working to ensure that the province offers one of the most competitive mining investment climates in Canada and in the world, which is recognized, Mr. Speaker, by mining commentators around the globe.

All change comes as a result of extensive consultation with our stakeholders. We've worked closely with the potash industry to introduce tax measures today that will stimulate optimal development. Saskatchewan has a more competitive business environment for the potash industry as a result of these changes.

We have an environment that rewards substantial new investment. At the same time we are preserving government's existing revenue base. The change will generate new opportunities and wealth all around. It will ensure Saskatchewan remains the dominant player in the international potash industry. This is good news, Mr. Speaker, and all members of this House should stay tuned for more good news.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Today's potash announcement enhances what is already a good news story in Saskatchewan. Our economy is growing, Mr. Speaker. We're building on our strengths to create new opportunities for our young people and to build our economy for future generations. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond on behalf of the Minister of Industry and Resources. And the Saskatchewan Party is pleased to hear today of the announced incentives that will encourage expansion of the potash industry in Saskatchewan.

Last fall, Mr. Speaker, there was concern that the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan was contemplating expanding in New Brunswick rather than in Saskatchewan because of the high taxation rate in Saskatchewan. The industry indicated that the tax — provincial tax combined with the federal tax — was 69 per cent, and in New Brunswick if they expanded there, the taxation would be less than half of the amount of what it would be in Saskatchewan.

At that time when the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan raised their concerns, the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party went on record and made comments in the House and in the press, indicating that the government should cut taxes to spur growth in the potash industry instead of driving investment away. He also went on to say that he called on the government to implement new growth tax cuts that will incent a company like PCS [Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan] to invest here. He further said that the government should implement changes that would lower the tax rate for incremental growth in the potash production.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition also in the *Promise of Saskatchewan*, his economic paper, advocates the creation of new growth tax incentives to spur economic growth in specified industries. And also in the Saskatchewan Party's 100 ideas, no. 21, we also reiterate the same policy, Mr. Speaker. So we are pleased today that the government has responded positively.

The Saskatchewan Party would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the industry for their efforts and their determination to sustain and grow the potash industry in Saskatchewan so that Saskatchewan can remain the world's leading producer of potash. The companies are prepared to increase their capacity to supply the ever increasing demand for potash but must be able to do so within a competitive environment. The potash industry is a major contributor to the economy and is key to job growth.

Today we support the government in its announcement, an announcement that outlines steps to ensure that there is a competitive advantage for the potash industry to remain and to expand in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

#### **Saskatchewan Government Insurance Injury Income Benefits**

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] announced that it is increasing injury income benefits to their most seriously injured customers. The government will soon introduce legislative amendments to make these income benefit enhancements possible. Mr. Speaker, upon proclamation of the legislative changes required, SGI customers who suffered catastrophic injuries prior to August 2002 will all receive the same income benefit based on the industrial average wage.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — The increase in income benefits will affect approximately 200 customers injured prior to the introduction of no-fault in 1995, Mr. Speaker, and before improvements were made to benefits in August 2002. In both cases some customers are currently receiving an income benefit less than the industrial average wage.

These customers who are permanently and severely injured will receive, at a minimum, an income benefit based on the industrial average wage which is currently at \$430.56 per week, Mr. Speaker. The benefit will be indexed to the consumer price index. This will mean an increase of as much as \$180 per week for some of the affected customers. This is a very important benefit announcement for these particular SGI customers who rely on these injury income benefits to live on, Mr. Speaker.

This change is being made to ensure that all customers who do not have choice in their insurance coverage prior to 2002 are all receiving the same level of benefits. The government is very pleased that SGI is able to make these enhancements to income

benefits without having to increase insurance rates and while providing Saskatchewan motorists with the lowest auto insurance rates in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — SGI's strong and prudent management has given it the flexibility needed to improve many benefits for its customers in recent years and especially in recent months. In January, SGI more than doubled the maximum benefit available to good drivers under the safe driver recognition program, again without increasing insurance rates.

Last month, I was able to announce that later this year SGI customers will be able to make Auto Fund transactions using credit cards, again without increasing insurance rates.

SGI is doing an excellent job of looking after the insurance needs of the people of Saskatchewan. The people of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan want to see it stay that way, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for sending me his speaking notes on this particular issue, prior to the House. Mr. Speaker, this is an important announcement and an important change at SGI, particularly in the area of funding those that were injured prior to 1995 and are on long-term disabilities.

I know that I have met over the years a number of them, particularly those that are brain injured that certainly do need the support. Mr. Speaker, they all need the support but that particular group has made representations to this Assembly in the past looking for additional support, and that is critical, Mr. Speaker.

[14:30]

The minister has mentioned that there's 200 customers that were injured prior to 1995 but he gave no numbers of those that will receive additional benefits from the implementation of no-fault insurance to 2002. And I think that would be an interesting number to receive because you have to ask, why did some people receive the maximum allowable for the average industrial wage and others did not? And if it was part of the formula that was in place for SGI, has the whole formula changed, or what has changed?

One of the concerns that I have though, Mr. Speaker, is whether or not there will be any retroactivity in payments made to these clients that may have been entitled to the full amount of the average industrial wage prior to 2002 and didn't receive it. Will they be receiving a top-up for that full amount? Because the minister talks about a one-time cost of \$30 million. Now as this increase goes on over the years, that there will be a cost in there, is that included in the \$30 million or is that a one-time, upfront cost of \$30 million?

The reason I'm concerned about that, Mr. Speaker, is that there was a Federal Court settlement, or decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada, in February that came down and that lump sum payments for benefits have now become taxable. Is SGI going to take that into account if they're making lump sum payments and pay sufficient funds so that the net is what is properly applied to the client rather than a gross that would then be taxable, Mr. Speaker?

This is a good move but the minister continues to need to explain and provide the details on this particular issue as they move ahead. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day under rule 7(1) to raise a point of privilege.

**The Speaker:** — Would the member please succinctly state his point of privilege.

#### PRIVILEGE

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today, SaskWater officials were holding an embargoed technical briefing on the 2004 annual report for members of the news media.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition sent a staff member to that technical briefing, requesting that they be in attendance, and a member of Executive Council told him he was prohibited from attending at the meeting.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a precedent set in the House of Commons in Ottawa that said when you deny access to members of the opposition, any members of this Assembly, to the same kind of information in a timely way as what happens to the media, that is a breach of privilege for members in this legislature, Mr. Speaker. We've sent you much more extensive arguments in this regard and we await your ruling.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — With your permission, Mr. Speaker, if I might make a few comments with respect to the issue of privilege for the House.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the ruling that the member references in the House of Commons in Ottawa is clearly with respect to legislation. This is not an issue of legislation that's before the Assembly.

I might also point out, Mr. Speaker, if it's a question of technical capacity of matters that are to come before the Legislative Assembly, we take the point of view, that is the Legislative Assembly takes the point of view, that there should be sufficient grants provided to the caucus offices so that they

can have the research staff that can assist them in reviewing documents that are to come before the Legislative Assembly. The members are certainly, I think, provided with embargoed copies of these reports and they have the research staff to help them to understand these documents, unlike the media who may not have that kind of capacity given . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. I would ask members not to intervene while another member is on his feet and the floor at this time. I invite the Government House Leader to proceed.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — So, Mr. Speaker, again the members of the opposition are provided with, in our view, sufficient funds to engage researchers to enable them to understand matters coming before the Legislative Assembly. We would take the point of view that that's not something that would necessarily be available to members of the media, who must cover a large number of files in any given day, and therefore a technical briefing would be appropriate for the media.

If it's the intent of the opposition that there should, in addition to caucus grants, now also be technical briefings on all matters coming before the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that from the government's point of view, we'd certainly be prepared to entertain that.

We received no request for any technical briefing from the media, only a request that they be able to attend an embargoed briefing for the media. It's not our responsibility, I would submit, to have the researchers . . . And I might point out that there was no request by a member. There was simply a request by staff of the members to go to this embargoed technical briefing. But if it's their intent to go to the briefing to see what the nature is of the inquiry on the part of the media, as to the — in this case — the report that was the subject of discussion, it's not our responsibility to provide the opposition with that kind of opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

But if the opposition is of the view that there should be, in addition to the grants they receive as a caucus, additional opportunities through technical briefings prior to something being tabled — not necessarily a technical briefing with the media — we would certainly entertain any such question, Mr. Speaker. But to say that the media receiving a briefing on a specific item, we should also be entitled to attend that because we want to know what kinds of questions the media might be asking, well it's not our responsibility to assist the opposition in determining what the lines of inquiry will be by the media.

As I've indicated, we provide them the funds so that they can do their research on the technical matters of issue coming before the Legislative Assembly. If they require something in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I think the government would certainly be prepared to entertain that. So I don't think that there's a question of privilege here at all, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — At 11:20 a.m. today, in accordance with rule 7(1), the Opposition House Leader gave notice that he proposed to raise a question of privilege. And I thank the member for providing notice and the documents related to his case. I also would like to thank the Opposition House Leader and for . . . the Government House Leader to provide the additional

information in their interventions this morning ... this afternoon. I've had an opportunity to review the case and review some of the literature involved.

In his case, the Opposition House Leader stated that a staff member of his caucus was denied access to a technical briefing on the 2004 annual report of the Saskatchewan Water Corporation. The decision to prohibit the attendance of the staff member, in the opinion of the Opposition House Leader, constitutes a breach of member's parliamentary privilege.

The basis of the member's case is a ruling by a Speaker of the House of Commons made March 19, 2001. In that ruling, Speaker Milliken found that the denial of members or their staff to an embargoed technical briefing for media on a Bill constituted a prima facie contempt of parliament. The Speaker's finding was later supported and reinforced by a review conducted on the matter by the House of Commons' standing committee on procedure and House affairs.

I want to remind members that under rule 1 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, in all cases not provided for, the usages and customs of the House of Commons of Canada as in force at the time shall be followed, so far as they may be applicable. I have surveyed the precedents of this Assembly and find none directly applicable to the denial of access of members or their staff from technical briefings.

In making his ruling, Speaker Milliken acknowledged that lock-ups and embargoed technical briefings, for a long time, had been the way parliamentary business was conducted at the House of Commons. He also stated very clearly that previous Speakers had consistently ruled that it is not a breach of privilege to exclude members from lock-ups.

However it was his point of view that the denial of information members needed to do their work was a key consideration in the case at the House of Commons, when members and their staff were denied access to technical briefings. Speaker Milliken stated the following:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to the media that will likely be questioning members about the business, is a situation the Chair cannot condone.

Despite this being a departure from previous rulings of the Chair, the House of Commons standing committee on procedure and house affairs supported the ruling.

In Saskatchewan, Speakers have admonished the government for releasing Bills to the public before their introduction to the Assembly. Such infractions were not considered a breach of privilege. However this Assembly has no case as close as the Milliken ruling I have just cited.

Despite that case relating to a technical briefing on a Bill, it is important to understand that whether a Bill or a report, the principles underscored by the House of Commons committee remain the same. That principle is, that nothing should be done that disadvantages or impedes members from carrying out their parliamentary functions. Speaker Milliken noted in his ruling

that the practice of media lock-ups and embargoed technical briefings, whether they be on Bills, budgets, or Auditor General reports, are successful and useful when members and staff are given access.

Given the Milliken ruling and the finding of the House of Commons committee on procedural and House affairs, as well as taking into consideration the arguments presented to this Assembly, I believe it would be appropriate for the Assembly to consider the direction that this Assembly wishes to take on this matter. Therefore I find that the Opposition House Leader has made sufficient case for me to find prima facie case of breach of privilege, and I invite the member to make his motion.

The Chair recognizes the member from Melfort.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Following my remarks I will be pleased to present a motion that will read as follows:

That this Assembly finds Executive Council staff members to be in contempt of the Legislative Assembly for denying official opposition access to the April 11, 2005, technical briefing on the 2004 SaskWater annual report, and that this Assembly urge government and Crown corporation officials to respect the rights and privileges of all members of this Assembly, by ensuring that official opposition members and their staff are allowed to attend any embargoed news conferences and technical briefings open to the members of the news media.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are some points that are really fundamentally important, to how any government and any opposition and members of this Legislative Assembly can conduct the responsibilities that are entrusted to them.

Mr. Speaker, it's certainly correct that all members of this Assembly are legitimately deserving of all the information that is pertinent and relevant to matters that are going to be considered by this House, in a timely way. Mr. Speaker, we understand that in order for this to function, that there are rules of embargo that have to apply and confidentiality that are appropriate. We are not arguing or disputing the fact that there is the question of embargoed releases — as the media understands there are questions of embargoed releases — of technical materials and information surrounding not only Bills but also those issues surrounding the Crown corporations, which clearly in this province are under the responsibility and purview of the Legislative Assembly committees on Crowns, in order to review and to be aware of the activities of the Crown corporations in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to address some of the issues that were made by the Government House Leader in commenting and providing advice for your ruling. Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is not asking for an increase of its budget in order to do research and these type of functions. What it's simply asking is for the government to allow, not on a case-by-case basis but on a matter of privilege, that when technical briefings are provided to the media, that members of the opposition and/or their designated staff are able to attend those technical briefings that are given so that officials from the various department or Crown corporation can make sure that

the media is fully aware and cognizant of what information is included in that Bill or in those Crown corporations.

[14:45]

Mr. Speaker, this does not require anything further than allowing for one or two extra persons to be in attendance at this technical briefing, so that when the members are briefed by their staff member after the embargo is lifted, and the media actually queries members for their reaction, that they will be in benefit of the same detailed information that the media itself is, who is posing the question to members.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is indeed as a matter of privilege that members should be entitled to that same level of information and confidence, that they have the greatest possible depth of knowledge about what the Bill or the Crown corporation report, in this case, is.

Mr. Speaker, it may well be that it's a departure from the current status quo, but I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that this is not without precedence, in terms of being allowed to technical briefings. And on March 22, one day prior to this last provincial budget, the official opposition requested of the Finance minister his permission for exactly this to happen — that the minister would allow that members of the opposition or designated staff would be in attendance at the technical briefing on the budget document. And I would like to quote from a document, Mr. Speaker, and I stress I am quoting and here is what the document said:

I, Harry Van Mulligen, hereby provide permission for Opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly and support staff to attend the Technical Briefing with respect to the 2005-06 Budget said Briefing scheduled for 9:00 a.m. March 23, 2005 in Room 218 of the Legislative Building subject to the terms and conditions of the Embargo Agreement.

Harry Van Mulligen signs this document, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we were very appreciative of the fact that we were allowed to send staff to that technical briefing on the budget document, and certainly I would express publicly our appreciation to the Minister of Finance for that courtesy and consideration.

But, Mr. Speaker, surely the official opposition does not have to go cap in hand every single time, case by case, every time there is a Bill or a Crown corporation tabling a document or an annual report and ask for the permission of the minister on an ad hoc basis and depending on the will of the minister and what mood they might be in at the day that we may or may not get access to these technical briefings.

Surely the precedence set by the Minister of Finance is a good precedent and something that all members of this Assembly would see as logical and appropriate and be very much desirous to support.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important to state that, you know, this House in the last two years or so have taken some steps to make this House operate more effectively and efficiently than

maybe it did in the past. And I think that this is an opportunity for the House to take a further step that would actually improve the quality and the knowledge of the members that are participating in debates and making comment on issues, either pertaining to Bills and legislation that is coming before the House or the budget on an annual basis of course and/or reports from our Crown corporations.

The government and I think the opposition understands very clearly and well how important it is that everyone has knowledge and a complete set of facts in terms of being able to comment on things that are before the House. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important that this House takes the time to consider this and consider it very importantly.

Mr. Speaker, in going through the details of this ruling, I think that there is information and precedent that certainly has come from the Speaker of the House of Commons in Canada on March . . . The situation was in March 2001 where a very similar circumstance pertained to the House of Commons in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, it was very similar insofar as a member of the staff of the opposition was denied access to a technical briefing, in this case on a piece of legislation, on a Bill and not a Crown corporation report. But I think that it is pretty clear that the House of Commons clearly believed that this was an issue.

The Speaker in his ruling on March 19 said, and I quote the following:

. . . the issue of denying members information that they need to do their work has been the key consideration for the Chair in reviewing this particular question of privilege. To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media [which] . . . will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that request by the opposition, the Speaker agreed that this was a matter that should be discussed by the House of Commons, and in their discussion there was an agreement by the House of Commons that this issue be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of the House of Commons. And so as a result of the motion that was put to the House of Commons, this issue was referred to a standing committee on privilege . . . or Procedure and House Affairs. That committee reported on the matter as follows, and again I quote:

The major difficulty in this case arises from the fact that the pre-introduction briefing was offered exclusively to representatives of the media. Not only were Members of the House of Commons not offered or invited to such a briefing, their staff [was] explicitly denied entry to the technical briefing that was given. Members were, therefore, predisposed to disadvantage and embarrassment in that they could be questioned about business to come before the House or [be] just introduced, without being provided with the same information as those asking them had. This is precisely what happened to Mr. Toews who was the Official Opposition critic for the Justice portfolio.

The committee went on to say, and I quote:



The provision of the briefing to the media and not to Members [of] legislation before its introduction to the House of Commons, undermines the pre-eminence of the House of Commons in legislative matters, and the right of the House to be informed first. Such an action impedes, obstructs, and disadvantages Members of Parliament in carrying out their parliamentary functions. In all of these circumstances, the Committee has come to the inescapable conclusion that the privileges of the House and its Members have been breached in this case.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the case that we've brought before this Assembly in regard to the issue that occurred today is very clearly similar in nature — almost, arguably, identical.

Clearly official opposition members require access to information about the Crown corporations' annual reports. All Crown corporations' annual reports are subject to the review by the Crown and Central Agency Committee which include members of the official opposition.

Therefore the official opposition, furthermore the official opposition critic is usually questioned by the media about each Crown report when it is released. This creates the real possibility that a member, on very short notice, is going to be facing questions based on information that the media could have as a result of the technical briefing, and the opposition member who has to make this comment is not privy to that same information.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, if you compare it to the situation of the House of Commons in Ottawa we have a very similar condition in this Legislative Assembly.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think it is indeed appropriate that this motion be considered and be supported by all members of this legislature, that this legislature looks at the issue of the role and responsibility, not only of government members and ministers of the Crown and senior members of Crown corporations, but also recognizes that in order for our parliamentary system to function in the true sense of the word, there has to be an informed and enlightened opposition who can then undertake their responsibility of holding to account the government and the members of the senior level of Crown corporations.

Mr. Speaker, I hope and trust that the government will see their way clear to supporting this motion. I certainly think that it is an important motion that needs to be considered. And I think, Mr. Speaker, that when the government recognizes that this is an important piece of change that can occur in this Assembly and occur for the betterment of the proper and thorough investigation and consideration of matters before this Assembly, that we will see that the government as well as opposition members will agree today to support the motion that has been proposed.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would move:

That this Assembly finds Executive Council staff members to be in contempt of the Legislative Assembly for denying the official opposition access to the April 11, 2005, technical briefing on the 2004 Saskatchewan Water Annual Report and that this Assembly urge government

and Crown corporation officials to respect the rights and privileges of all members of this Assembly by ensuring that official opposition members and their staff are allowed to attend any embargoed news conferences and technical briefings open to members of the news media.

Mr. Speaker, I would so move this, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Southeast.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the member from Melfort and seconded by the member for Saskatoon Southeast:

That this Assembly finds Executive Council staff members to be in contempt of the Legislative Assembly for denying the official opposition access to the April 11, 2005, technical briefing on the 2004 SaskWater Annual Report and that this Assembly urge government and Crown corporation officials to respect the rights and privileges of all members of this Assembly by ensuring that official opposition members and their staff are allowed to attend any embargoed news conferences and technical briefings open to members of the news media.

The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to second my colleague's motion. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comments made by the member from Melfort. And I'm frankly troubled that this is an issue that is even before the House today.

The issue that we're dealing with is the very essence of how a government communicates with its citizens. I think we have become so embroiled unfortunately in politics and political gamesmanship that what we're doing is thwarting the very reason that we were elected to serve. This is not something that's part of partisan or party politics. This goes to the very method and the very issue of what a government was elected to do, and that was to pass legislation, pass a budget, and communicate with its citizens.

What happens and what this government wants you to do, Mr. Speaker, is to allow them to say, we will selectively choose which citizens we feel are appropriate to give embargoed information to and which citizens we feel are not appropriate to do that.

What would happen, Mr. Speaker, if to carry this to its conclusion, they'd say, oh well, we don't think the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] is particularly supportive. They're using these things for what we don't think are supportable purposes, even though there's never been an issue that the embargo has been breached. But they say the CBC, for example, is not using this information appropriately, fairly, or for the reason it was put forward, Mr. Speaker. So at that point in time they say, we will do a technical briefing for all the media in the province with the exception of the CBC.

Mr. Speaker, the underlying principle that's here is that this information is not party information or political information. This is information prepared by government agencies, Crown corporations, and departments — information that was prepared and put together by professional civil servants with taxpayer dollars. This is something that is funded by the citizens of this

province, and it is not right for anyone in this government to stand up and say, we wish now to be selective and decide who we can parcel information to, at what point, and in what fashion we can do it.

If a member of the media is entitled to that information, clearly a member of the opposition should be entitled to be there so they know what type of questions will be put forward so that they can have the same background information that the media has with regard to the operation of whether it's a government department, a Crown corporation, or any other entity that is funded with taxpayer dollars.

[15:00]

This goes to the very fundamentals of our democratic process, Mr. Speaker. And I think if the members opposite step back and just consider who is paying for this, they would give it some thought and they would say, absolutely. As soon as we're going to give it to the media, we should give it to the members opposite. They sign the embargo agreement the same way that the media does, and deal with it in this same fashion.

Mr. Speaker, the research and background material that's given at technical briefings is not prepared by caucus staffers or party staffers. That information is prepared by civil servants — who are on a government payroll — and very much belongs to the public at large, to the citizens of this province. To try and treat that information otherwise or try and deal with it in a selective fashion is inappropriate. It's wrong, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, I find it offensive that we're even having to have this debate.

When this information is put forward, put forward to the media, clearly we're in a position that we should have that information as members of the opposition. We as members of the opposition have constituents and have citizens of the province that contact us for information. To put members of the opposition or members of the government — whether they're backbench, cabinet, or this side of the House or that side — at a disadvantage in dealing with their constituents is wrong. It's offensive. It's not right, and it's not democratic. And I think if those members had to account to their citizens and say, gee I'm not entitled to have this information — only some MLAs are entitled to it — it's something that would not be acceptable. And I'd like to urge them to give this matter some serious second thought.

Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a situation that is exactly . . . [inaudible] . . . with the situation that arose in the House of Commons. The Speaker gave a thorough and well-reasoned judgment in that decision. A copy of that has been provided to the Government House Leader and to yourself. And the comments that you raise are something that I think is fair. It's appropriate and . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. I would just ask the member not to refer to any remarks with respect to the Speaker in this debate.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I'll just deal specifically with the ruling that was made, Mr. Speaker. What was happening in Ottawa was virtually the same thing that was happening here. Courtesy information was being provided on an ad hoc basis, subject to

signing an ad hoc . . . The technical background, which is the access to the officials that prepared the documents, that dealt with it, that information was not given to other members, and those members were not adequately able to carry out their function.

They . . . [inaudible] . . . and the Speaker made a ruling, and made a ruling that that was something that was undemocratic, a wrongful use of government funds to try and deal with it, and talked about lock-ups, talked about other things.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an issue of a lock-up or something where you may glean some information by the long term that you spend there, or trying to spin the media, to use that term. This is simply a matter where information is provided, usually by way of a PowerPoint presentation, by way of having two or three government officials there that are able to answer questions, have some form of dialogue with them.

So, Mr. Speaker, we find this something that we're not at all comfortable with. There will probably come a time in the future — and frankly, I hope the not-too-distant future — where the members opposite may be sitting on this side of the House, some of them that do get re-elected, and certainly would not want to see them in that position where they have to go back to their constituents and where they have to go to their constituents and say, I'm sorry, I'm not in government any more, therefore I can't get this information, or I don't understand this issue.

It's imperative that all of us as MLAs are going to have to have full, complete, frank, and open access to all information that's prepared by or for any government official when it's being presented to the media.

Mr. Speaker, I just think that the members opposite should give it some serious thought to what kind of precedent they want to send, and what kind of a message that they wish to send to their constituents, to their taxpayers, and to the citizens of this province by this kind of a selective democratic process which, frankly, is not allowed in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, the rules of our legislature are that unless contrary in another rule or ruling, we are bound by the precedent set in parliament. And, Mr. Speaker, the precedent that's put forward is exactly on point, except that it deals with a Bill rather than a technical briefing dealing with a finance matter. And frankly, I can see absolutely no difference whatsoever.

It's a matter that that is the information that the public is entitled to, that is the information that MLAs will be asked about, and there's not a reason in the world why each and every MLA shouldn't be there or shouldn't be entitled to have an official from their office, from their department to be there to gain and gather the information that's to be there — and to not only that, but to hear the questions that are being asked by other members of the media, other MLAs from either side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I think that all the members over there have in the past, at least outwardly, put forward the position that they wanted to be democratic and wanted to be perceived as being democratic. And for them now to say, no, we're not doing this;

we're going to use those taxpayer dollars to be secretive; we're going to use that information to try and thwart you, the opposition, in your obligation to carry out your role; Mr. Speaker, it is offensive. It's not something that I think this legislature or the legislature in any province would condone or should carry out.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move to second this motion and urge all members to support this motion and would hope that we're in the position that, after brief consideration, some of the members opposite would very quickly want to be supportive of this as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all of the comments that I've heard from the opposition in this with respect to this motion.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that when issues of reporting accountability are brought to the attention of the government, we tend to respond positively. I think our record over the course of the last 14 years or so has been a very good record in Saskatchewan.

No one could possibly confuse the record of the NDP government in Saskatchewan with that of the Devine Conservative administration which preceded it in the 1980s. Some of the members opposite either served with that administration or worked in that administration, worked very hard then to deny access of members of the Legislative Assembly to report.

One remembers, one remembers the comments of the Finance minister at that time when he was asked about not providing the public accounts in a timely fashion — said that, well I don't have to do that and if I don't have to do that, I'm not going to do that. And so it was with the public accounts; so it was with any number of reports. So it was with measures that would help the members of the Legislative Assembly and the public to understand important things like the finances. The changes since 1991 have been very great in this Assembly and I think it speaks well to the record of the government that we embrace reporting, we embrace accountability, Mr. Speaker. So there is much for us to agree with in the comments of the members opposite.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that we've always taken the position that opposition members should be assisted to be able to understand the great complexity of matters that come before the Legislative Assembly. It is for that reason that the grants to the caucus offices, and in particular the opposition caucus, has grown substantially over the years so that the members can have the benefit of both staff internal to their caucus to research and review matters that come before us, whether it's legislation or budgetary or reports such as the report under question, but also to engage research advice from outside their caucus, that is to say professional research and advice from within the community at large.

So we've taken a position that caucus members, and particularly the opposition caucus, should be funded appropriately to enable them to do that, and I'm pleased to see that there has in fact been almost a tripling of the caucus office grants to the opposition caucus over the course of the last number of years. And we would hope that that tripling of funds, Mr. Speaker, will assist them to do the research that is necessary to understand the complexities of matters that come before us, but we don't lay hard and fast rules about how those funds should be expended. If the opposition, for example, wants to spend that money on television advertising to promote their leader, well that's certainly their prerogative and their right to do so, Mr. Speaker.

I might point out too that there's an important distinction here between the research capacity and the support that is provided for the opposition caucus to understand the complexity as matters come before us.

I might point out that in addition to that, members themselves are in a position to ask questions in committees of the Legislative Assembly. I would note that this particular report will be referred to a committee of the Legislative Assembly, and in that committee the members have the opportunity to ask detailed questions about what is in the report and detailed questions about the activities of the corporation in question.

That's not something that the media can do, Mr. Speaker, but that certainly is a right that the members have. And they're assisted by their research capacity which is in turn supported by a vote of the members of the Legislative Assembly and something that we've always supported, Mr. Speaker, because we believe that in our system of government there should be an opposition that is in a position to effectively criticize the government of the day.

Mr. Speaker, the technical briefings for the media are provided so that the media members might be in a better position to understand some of the technical details in those reports. Those are briefings that are provided by officials — or responsible officials in this case — would have been provided by the officials of SaskWater prior to a press conference, an embargoed press conference with the minister.

So I'm not really clear what it is that members will gain from that kind of technical briefing. Again, given the level of support they have for research capacity, what additional information would be provided that they cannot garner at this point, recognizing too that in this particular case, when it comes to a report, that the report in question, the members receive an embargoed copy of that report the day before, I believe. And they certainly have an opportunity again for their research staff to go over that report and to prepare the members with any relevant questions that might be forthcoming from the tabling of that report here in the Legislative Assembly.

And I don't think that the media necessarily have the technical research capacity to do an in-depth analysis of a report such as this. And that is one of the reasons that over time it's seen as necessary to provide some technical background for the media on what is contained in the report so that they might be assisted in asking their questions of the appropriate government officials.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition, in addition to the research support that is provided to them, if in addition to that the opposition wants a technical briefing for their members and the members' staff, the opposition only need ask the government. We'd be pleased to provide that kind of technical briefing.

I'm not sure that I would want to necessarily, as the motion indicates, provide them entry to the technical briefing that's provided to the media because in our view the opposition is more interested in that technical briefing for the lines of inquiry that the media have so that they might then use those lines of inquiry in question period or outside of question period. So it's more a matter of determining what is the spin that should be put on this as opposed to understanding the details of the reports, in this case the SaskWater Corporation report that comes before the Legislative Assembly.

[15:15]

So I would make a distinction about what kinds of opportunities should be provided for the opposition. If it's a technical briefing for matters . . . for members of the opposition, the same technical briefing that we would provide to the media, then we're quite prepared to do that. And if we had been asked to do that in this particular case, we would do that.

But to gain entry into a technical briefing for the media so that they can gain insight, not necessarily into the report, but into the direction that the media is going, well that's something else again. And I don't propose that it's my responsibility to make the opposition spin doctors, their work, to make it any easier, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's not our responsibility to assist them to understand what the media is thinking, and where it is that the media want to go. I was interested to hear that the member for Saskatoon Southeast, when he seconded the motion, in fact made it clear that what they want to do is they want to understand the media's questions. Well it may assist them in terms of what kinds of questions they would ask in question period. It may assist them in terms of how to put the right spin on things in the media scrums that are held after question period, but that's not our responsibility to do that for them, Mr. Speaker.

And so I take the point of view that if it's a matter of technical briefings for members of the opposition, the same technical briefing that's provided to the media, then we're quite prepared to provide that kind of opportunity for members of the opposition, Mr. Speaker.

I would venture to say that questions of reporting, accountability are evolving questions. We as a government take our work seriously that the House, the government, must be accountable to the people of Saskatchewan, that we should always look in good faith at opportunities that help us to improve accountability.

I think the suggestion from the opposition that there be technical briefings is a reasonable suggestion. We're prepared to look at that and to work with them in good faith. We've taken a number of steps over time, whether it's providing for the appointment for example, of a Provincial Auditor by the

Public Accounts Committee as opposed to the Provincial Auditor being appointed by the government — as was the case in the administration that they supported many years ago, Mr. Speaker — you know, that's the approach that we've taken over time and the approach that we want to continue to take.

Mr. Speaker, I find that some sections of the motion to not be acceptable to the government, and therefore I'm going to argue that by way of amendment that those comments be excluded from a further review of the amended motion so that . . . by the Committee on Privileges so that that committee can examine this issue and come back perhaps with some guidelines for the Legislative Assembly as to how we should deal with this matter in the future.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I then move, seconded by the member for Yorkton:

That all the words before "that this Assembly urge government" be deleted and that the motion so amended be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges.

I so move, seconded by the member for Yorkton, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. I've had a moment to look at the motion, and I would ask the Government House Leader, the member for Regina Douglas Park, if he would be in agreement with the Speaker's rewording of his motion in this manner, that the motion would read:

That all the words before "that this Assembly urge government" be deleted and the following words be added:

that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges.

It has been moved by the member for Regina Douglas Park and seconded by the member for Yorkton:

That all the words before "that this Assembly urge government" be deleted and the following words be added:

that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges.

Seconded by the member for Yorkton.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Question.

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been an ongoing issue in this Assembly for a good number of years, Mr. Speaker, the opposition's opportunity to have access to technical briefings provided by government officials to the media.

I remember back, shortly after 2001, decision made by the

House of Commons and Speaker Milliken to allow opposition members and staff in Ottawa at the House of Commons to have access to the technical briefings that were being given to reporters in Ottawa.

A budget was coming down in Saskatchewan that year and the member from Saskatoon Massey Place was the Finance minister at the time. And he was going to deny the opposition and their staff members access to the technical briefing that was being given to the reporters that evening prior to the budget that was going to be delivered the next day.

And the fact is the denial was even beyond the technical briefing. He was not going to allow the opposition members to even have access to the budget at all, which meant that the media was going to have access; therefore, the public in the sense of the media would have access to government information 12 hours prior to that access being given to the members of the opposition, Mr. Speaker.

And based on the ruling by Speaker Milliken in Ottawa, when we raised this issue with the member from Saskatoon Massey Place at the time, he finally did relent and allow the opposition to have access to the budget documents and I believe at that time as well, to the technical briefing, Mr. Speaker.

But since that time, from time to time, this very issue raises its head again, Mr. Speaker — over and over — where the government wants to deny the opposition members to access to information that it's providing to the media, therefore to the public, Mr. Speaker. So members who are elected at large by the people of Saskatchewan are being denied access to information which they need to carry out their duties as the elected representatives of each of the constituencies across this province, Mr. Speaker, information which the public . . . excuse me, which the government is giving to the media and to the public.

That is a totally unacceptable situation, Mr. Speaker, and a situation which Speaker Milliken in Ottawa ruled was unacceptable — that members of the opposition should have access to information equal to that of the media, Mr. Speaker. If there is an embargoed copy of information, if there are embargoed technical briefings, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition have the same access as the media has — not different access, Mr. Speaker — the same access, the same bureaucrats, the same information, the same opportunity to question, Mr. Speaker.

And those things the government has been trying to deny time and time again, until they're reminded of Speaker Milliken's ruling and then they relent. This time, Mr. Speaker, the briefing this morning, the government did not provide access to. And that is clearly, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, a breach of the member's privilege of this Assembly, that the public has access to information prior to the members being given access.

I listened to the remarks by the Minister of Finance, the member from Regina Douglas Park, Mr. Speaker, and earlier in his comments, before the ruling was made to allow for this debate, he argued that resources . . . that the opposition had significant resources to provide themselves with the information, that the issue was about resources not about access to the information.

And yet I find it farcical, Mr. Speaker, that that member turns around and says the media — CanWest Global, CTV [Canadian Television Network Limited], the CBC, Rawlco Radio, Rawlco corporation — do not have the resources available to themselves to acquaint themselves with the issues, to acquaint themselves with the legislation, with the reports, that the government needs to provide them with a technical briefing as to what the reports and legislation is about, but that the official opposition, Mr. Speaker, has the resources to do that.

[15:30]

Mr. Speaker, these companies that represent the media, that are going to the technical briefings, that the ministers are inviting in, are multi-multi-million dollar corporations. Yes, some of them are funded by the public. CBC receives hundreds of millions of dollars every year, Mr. Speaker, but they don't have enough resources, so the government will provide them with a technical briefing, while the members of the opposition, who receive only in the thousands of dollars, Mr. Speaker, for their research, have more than enough resources, according to the minister.

I'd like to point out to the minister that, yes, the resources available to the official opposition have indeed increased over the last number of years. The reason for that is, Mr. Speaker, is because we have elected a lot more members on this side of the House, much to the member from Regina Douglas Park's chagrin, I'll admit — much to his chagrin. But the people of Saskatchewan chose to make the opposition almost as large as the government and therefore provide resources, Mr. Speaker.

But down the road, it's not to say that the next opposition will have the same number of people, therefore the same number of resources. But the rules will apply equally, whether you have a large opposition such as we have today or where you have a very small opposition, such as what we've had in the past, Mr. Speaker, with eight members.

Mr. Speaker, the resources are reliant on the number of members, not the fact that you're in opposition or in government, Mr. Speaker. So when the government argues that there is sufficient resources available presently, that may not necessarily be the case today and it certainly will not be the case tomorrow, where the resources made available are dependent on numbers, even though the rule application, Mr. Speaker, will be identical.

So if members of the opposition are expected to do all of the research that the government has already done and gather the information that the government has already gathered once, Mr. Speaker, the next opposition needs to have access to that information equally. The rules will apply the same. Whether you're small or large, it'll be irrelevant because that will be the rule. And the government of today, the NDP government of today is trying to deny access.

And yet the minister stood in his place here not five minutes ago complaining, Mr. Speaker, complaining that the previous administration did not give the opposition of the day access. And so what is the minister's reply to that, what is the minister's actions? To do exactly the same thing that the previous administration done, the one that he was criticizing,

Mr. Speaker.

So I have to ask, is that minister, is the member from Regina Douglas Park prepared to criticize himself for doing exactly what the previous administration did, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, he can't have it both ways. He can't claim to be the saviour democrat and yet act exactly like the group before him did that he is condemning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I find it, as I mentioned earlier, amazing that the minister would want to defend the corporations, the multi-million dollar corporations in the media that they don't have enough resources but that the opposition does have. I find that ludicrous, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I have to ask, why? Why does the minister want to deny the opposition access to the same, same briefing, the same technical briefing that the media are at? What is he hiding? What information becomes available to the media that they don't want the opposition to have, Mr. Speaker?

Are they going to present two different briefings? Are there going to be two separate sets of books provided? Is the briefing simply going to be their dog and pony show and then . . . [inaudible] . . . out the door before anybody can ask any questions? You don't know, Mr. Speaker, because you're not at both of them to judge whether or not the presentations are the same.

So is the member going to be given access to the same information, to the same officials, for the same amount of time that is provided to the public by the media, Mr. Speaker?

We can't make rules in this House that will become that specific unless we want to create laws that are huge and immense and try to cover every possible situation. No, Mr. Speaker, what this House needs to do is to make a rule regarding access to embargoed materials, to embargoed briefings, that everyone has the same access and equal opportunity at those briefings, Mr. Speaker, regardless of whether you're in the media, the official opposition, or whomever else the government is giving access to. But the official opposition has to have equal access and equal opportunity at those briefings, Mr. Speaker.

The government, the Minister of Finance, was talking about the costs. Well certainly, Mr. Speaker, it's going to increase the cost if you're having two separate briefings. If you're doing it two separate times, that means that the government officials have to be here twice as long, you have to have two different rooms, or perhaps the same room for twice as long, Mr. Speaker. So it becomes an additional cost that the Minister of Finance is saying they can't afford.

Well, Mr. Speaker, why is the minister suggesting spending twice as much money if he's saying that they can't afford to do it? Do it all at the same time, Mr. Speaker. Give the members the same access that he is giving to the media, Mr. Speaker.

I guess the minister in his comments is saying that the media should have access to the briefings but the opposition shouldn't necessarily have access to the briefings; is saying that he doesn't believe the media has the technical competency to be

able to understand the issue, to be able to understand the budget, to be able to understand the Crown report, such as it was this morning; that the government has to go in there and spoon-feed them, Mr. Speaker.

Well I think the media has a lot more ability than what the minister gives them credit for. They have an understanding, and that's perhaps what the minister is concerned about. He doesn't want the official opposition in there to hear the questions that the media is asking of the officials to gain an understanding, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why he's afraid of the media's questions, but he certainly seems to be, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has moved an amendment to this particular motion, Mr. Speaker, and the part that he is removing — and I'd like to read it:

That this Assembly finds Executive Council staff members to be in contempt of the Legislative Assembly for denying the official opposition access to the April 11, 2005 technical briefing on the 2004 SaskWater annual report . . .

Well, Mr. Speaker, if there is no breach of privilege then obviously the members of Executive Council are not in contempt of the Legislative Assembly. But if they have indeed breached the privilege of the members of this Assembly, then they are in contempt of this legislature, Mr. Speaker. And it needs to be clearly laid out that any member of Executive Council or of the government that denies the members of this House on either side the opportunities to fulfill their duties as elected by the members, by the people of their constituency, that they are indeed in contempt.

Mr. Speaker, it needs to be made clear to the government, to Executive Council, and to their employees that they have to follow the rules, that it is in contempt of this legislature if they fail to do so. And to deny a member of this Assembly his rights and privileges to represent his constituents is a contempt of this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and needs to be dealt with as such.

And that's why we're bringing forward this motion, because we believe that the actions of the members of Executive Council breaches the privileges of the members of this Assembly, in this case the members of the official opposition, Mr. Speaker. And the Executive Council needs to be reprimanded for that, Mr. Speaker. It needs to be clearly pointed out to them that they have no rights to deny the opposition access to the very same information on an equal basis as they provide to the media and to the public, Mr. Speaker. And that is exactly what they have been trying to do over and over again a number of times, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Milliken in Ottawa in 2001 reviewed a somewhat similar situation and made a very clear ruling, Mr. Speaker, that government cannot deny opposition the access to information that they're providing to the public through the media — to members of the Assembly, to members of the House.

I think that this House can find no other ruling, Mr. Speaker, than to agree that members of this Assembly have to have equal access, the same as the media and the public have, Mr. Speaker, to information, and that to deny members that same

opportunity, equal access and equal rights, Mr. Speaker, to be fair it has to be available to all members of this Assembly at the same time so that members can carry out their duties.

We walk out of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, after a presentation of an annual report. Let's say it happens after routine proceedings, 2:30 in the afternoon. The media have had this for four or five hours, whatever the case may be, and yet the members of the official opposition are expected to walk outside and answer questions on a document that may be of considerable size and content within five minutes. It makes it extremely difficult, Mr. Speaker, to be able to deal with those situations.

So members on both sides of the House need to have equal access and equal opportunity to bring fairness to the debate, Mr. Speaker, because otherwise the members of this House have had their privilege breached and are unable to perform their duty in the manner that is required.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to vote against the amendment which tries to neuter this motion and support the original motion, Mr. Speaker. I will be voting in favour of the original motion.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a . . . I guess I wish I could say it was a privilege to join into the debate on this motion, but it really isn't when you think of the intent of the amendment to take away from the motion that was put forward.

The motion that was put forward was very common sense. It is the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker. It talks about openness. It talks about accountability. It talks about a number of things that really have been precedent setting in this Assembly and in the House of Commons that have been set up for years, Mr. Speaker. With the opposition members or staff attending technical briefings is nothing new. We have been doing it over a number of years that I have been present in this House, Mr. Speaker.

So unfortunately, for some reason, whether the Minister of Finance got up on the wrong side of the bed today or whoever was in charge of the technical briefing for SaskWater got up on the wrong side of the bed today or perhaps even more importantly there was something in that briefing that the media may ask that they didn't want to get out — maybe that's what it was, Mr. Speaker. Maybe that's what it was.

Maybe there was something in the technical briefing that they didn't want to have go public and were just hoping the media maybe asked it and the officials answered it and it wouldn't get reported after. But they sure didn't want the opposition. So you know it's really, really unfortunate that we have to have this debate and speak on the motion and now the amendment.

I want to talk about the two or three arguments that the Minister of Finance used as to why this motion couldn't go forward, why

the government could not agree with the motion put forward, Mr. Speaker. And I would invite, I truly would invite members on the government side to stand and justify why they are going against this motion, why they can't support the motion, defend what they are doing, Mr. Speaker. Because quite frankly, quite frankly the arguments put forward by the Minister of Finance, the member from Regina Douglas Park, really do not hold any water at all. And he was really kind of treading in quicksand, and really had a very difficult job rationalizing why they couldn't support the motion. He really couldn't defend their actions.

[15:45]

His first argument when he started speaking to this motion is he was talking about, oh doesn't the opposition have enough money to do the proper research? That was his first argument, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, it's really interesting. And I've been in this House for six years and I've listened to the member from Regina Douglas Park, the Minister of Finance, when he was minister of Social Services . And I've heard him speak many, many times on different — whether its private members' day or whatever — and you can be guaranteed when he gets into trouble, when things aren't going very well for him, he will always revert back to the 1980s. He always reverts back to the 1980s when things aren't going quite the way he expected them to or wanted them to.

And it's interesting. You know, I think it was the Minister of Health the other day said, get over it; get over the 1980s because they are long gone. But it's interesting because he's arguing about how terrible things were then, he was arguing about how terrible things were run in the 1980s. And what he is doing today is absolutely what he was arguing against in the 1980s. It's the height of hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker, to say that it was so terrible in the 1980s, and then do the very thing in the year 2005 that he was complaining about back 25 years ago.

Because you know, in the 1980s — I believe it was the election of 1982 when the then premier at that time, prior to the 1982 election — Allan Blakeney was in power. And it was a tired and worn-out government, not un-similar to what we're facing today, Mr. Speaker. And it was a government that had lost touch. It felt that . . . it was arrogant; it could hide things; it could do just whatever it wanted to leading up to that 1982 election.

Well things changed quite significantly and the government changed to a Progressive Conservative government under Grant Devine . And I believe the Allan Blakeney government were reduced to — and you can correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm sure they will from the other side — about 10 seats . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 8 seats. Thank you for correcting me. I thought it was 66 seats and they were down to 58 government and 8 opposition.

Regardless, at that time after that election, there were eight members. So I would use the Minister of Finance's argument that how we get financing, how we get resources to staff and have research is so many dollars per member. So at that time, when there were only eight NDP members, there would have

been very little, limited — extremely limited — resources for that NDP opposition caucus at that time to hire researchers, to do the work that the opposition needed to have done, Mr. Speaker.

So his argument right now is, there's more than enough money. There's more than enough money for the opposition to hire the researchers that they need, and so we shouldn't be allowed into the technical briefings.

Well let's fast forward this. Maybe in four years, maybe in two or three years, maybe in eight years, when that cycle turns around again sometime — and I don't care whether it's a Sask Party government or an NDP government — but the opposition is limited to five or six seats, five or six seats, and then see if the Minister of Finance thinks it's right and just that, oh, the opposition has five or six seats; they may have one researcher; that should be all the information they need. Under that one researcher, they should be able to glean all the information they need to respond properly to the various issues that come forward.

It's an absolute ludicrous argument, Mr. Speaker, because after the 2003 election, the opposition is as big as an opposition can possibly be in this province. The opposition will never be larger than it is in this legislative session, Mr. Speaker, at 28 members.

So because we receive, again, allowance per member and we do have a very highly qualified and competent staff of researchers, that doesn't mean that because the opposition is at 28, they shouldn't be allowed into a technical briefing. That has absolutely nothing to do with the argument. The argument is access to information that is being provided to media. Does it matter whether it's an opposition of 2, 22, or 28? Is that the argument that the government is using, because that is the argument that the Minister of Finance has used, Mr. Speaker.

And as I said, I would invite other members of the government caucus to stand up and say, is that the argument you're going to use. If the argument is that you've got enough members so you've got a full cadre of research staff, you shouldn't be allowed into technical briefings, but if you only have . . . let's see, British Columbia with two NDP opposition members, two opposition NDP members in British Columbia — and they should not be allowed into any technical briefings? Or because they only have two members in the opposition NDP caucus in British Columbia, they should be allowed in, but if they had 20 members in the NDP opposition caucus, they shouldn't be?

Is that the argument, Mr. Speaker? Because that's the exact argument that the Minister of Finance has put forward. It has absolutely no basis. The members in British Columbia, the opposition . . . Just for people that maybe don't know, it was a NDP majority government that was absolutely annihilated down to two members, Mr. Speaker.

Well hypothetically, and I don't think it's that hypothetically, but let's imagine in a year or two when it's a Sask Party government that's absolutely annihilated this NDP government and they have two members, should we stand up when we're in government on that side of the House and say, well with two members you have more than enough research capital; you shouldn't be allowed into technical briefings? Or should we say

because you only have two members, you should be but you won't be if you would've elected four more or twenty more. Is that the argument? Because that was the argument put forward and if that's the argument put forward, I would ask members of the government to stand up and defend that debate, Mr. Speaker, because they can't; it is undefendable, Mr. Speaker.

The other area that he talked about, and certainly has been some talk, is that perhaps we should have a second briefing. We should have a briefing for the media and then we'll make sure everybody clears the room and the officials can stay there and we'll bring in the opposition staffers or the opposition MLAs and we'll do it all over again, Mr. Speaker. That's what the government thinks should happen, is that we should have a mulligan, I guess you'd call it. That's what the Minister of Finance would say is that, because we had the opposite . . . We had the staff in there for the first briefing, we'll have a redo or we'll do it again. We'll have a . . . like a mulligan, a mulligan so that the opposition can stand up and ask the same questions that the . . .

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — Why is the member on his feet?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Requesting leave to introduce guests.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — Okay.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce some guests who are in your gallery. They are visiting here from British Columbia. It is Martin Dillabough from Quesnel and his daughter Julia. Julia is attending university here in the school of justice and also plays hockey for the Cougars. And so we'd like to welcome them to the House.

I would say that . . . just to let you know that Martin runs a dude ranch out in Quesnel and if any of the members would like to go for a guided trail ride overnight or a longer period, they would be welcome to contact him. So nice to have them here and I'd ask members to welcome them to the House.

**Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

#### PRIVILEGE (continued)

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for not letting me talk . . .

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member opposite has twice now used the phrase that the Speaker has previously ruled out of order as an attempt to bait and insult the Minister of Finance. And I would ask that you ask for him to withdraw his comment.



**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Southeast. Or why is the member on his feet?

**Mr. Morgan:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to respond to the member opposite's point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the comment that was made by the member from Indian Head-Milestone didn't deal with the Minister of Finance and didn't deal with any member by name. It dealt with a golfing tournament; it dealt with an unrelated issue.

I can understand the ruling that the Speaker made earlier where it was talking about what the Finance minister had done and where there was an issue with name similarity. What we're talking about is the golf tournament redo or takeover, no different whatsoever than any number of other places where that term might be appropriate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're at a point where we cannot be overly sensitive on this type of issue, where we're not talking about the Minister of Finance or somewhere else where there may be an issue of taking somebody's name or using it otherwise. We cannot, we cannot develop a system of rules where we cannot carry on our business or make a point or make a routine statement for fear that somebody's name might be . . .

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — The Speaker has previously ruled that the member would refrain from using the word mulligan and I would also so rule. I recognize the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll certainly try and refrain from using the term mulligan as much as I possibly can. I'm even thinking about — well I won't go any further down that line — about a golf tournament that we do have coming up. And you know, we send . . . we sell extra shots I guess is what we'll call it. So we'll certainly say that we'll call an extra shot. We'll ask the . . .

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — Why is the member on his feet?

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, to raise a point of order.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — Point of orders. Go ahead. I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, it's well established in our rules and in our practices that when Mr. Speaker makes a ruling as you have done, sir, then the member who then rises to his or her feet should then not reflect upon that ruling, as the member for Indian Head has just been doing. So I would ask you to rule the member out of order. And if the member can't stick to being in order, then you should ask him to . . . or you should move on to another speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Iwanchuk):** — I would caution the

member from Indian Head-Milestone to refrain from commenting on the Speaker's ruling. I recognize the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll just go down another fairway on this discussion, Mr. Speaker. And we'll start talking a little more about, for example the . . . Now I've lost my train of, my train of thought. When we talk . . . What I was talking about, Mr. Speaker, what I was talking about, Mr. Speaker, was the fact that we could have a technical briefing for the media and then turn around and have another technical briefing for the rest of, whoever needed to be there, Mr. Speaker — whether it was ourselves as MLAs or whether it was our staff, Mr. Speaker.

But even more importantly, and I can remember attending a couple of technical briefings that I was allowed into, not in the role as Health critic but in previous roles, and I found it quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. And I'll be very interested to know what the government policy is in the event, or using the examples of the briefings that I was attending, where there were a number of third party interest groups at that technical briefing, Mr. Speaker. The technical briefings that I happened to be at, I would say there were five — no less than five — third party interest groups interested in what the discussion or what the issue was. And it was . . . I mean, it was about school board amalgamations.

[16:00]

The technical briefing was on school board amalgamations and there were people there from the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation]. There were people there from the school boards association. There were people there from LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents]. There was people there from SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. And there was people there from SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. They all had a vested interest on what this announcement was being made, the announcement that was being made regarding school board amalgamation.

Now we had asked if we could sit in on the technical briefing as well and the government said yes, you may. There is not a problem with you sitting in on the technical briefing. They had absolutely nothing to hide. There was nothing to hide. They had made their decision on what they were doing with school board amalgamation. Whether we agreed with that or not had no bearing on whether we were allowed in.

I think we had been on the record and I had spoke before about the amalgamation issue and the government knew where we would be standing. They knew what their announcement was. So it didn't have any basis as to whether we agreed with what was being announced or disagreed.

The government was announcing school board amalgamations and the School Boards Association really wanted to know all the ins and outs and hear the media ask the questions. And certainly they would be asking those questions later, but they wanted to know what the media would be asking the minister and his . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The Minister of Finance is saying, oh yes. Well what were they there for then, Minister

of Finance? Why were they allowed into the technical briefing? Why were they allowed into the technical briefing, Mr. Speaker?

They were interested in the information being given by the department officials that perhaps they didn't have access to at the time because, you know, the announcement would have been made and the media would have been asking the School Boards Association for their point of view. They would have been asking the teachers association for their point of view. They would have been asking Neal Hardy and SARM their point of view. They would have been asking Don Schlosser and SUMA their point of view.

And they were able to be in and listen to the department rationalize and explain the reason for school board amalgamation, Mr. Speaker. And we were able to sit in on that briefing too and learn what the department officials had to say about school board amalgamation.

Now it seems really quite interesting that the government would open it up to the media and they would open it up to the special interest groups — the third party special interest groups — but then say no, opposition MLAs and staff can't attend. Is that what it's going to be?

Okay, so the member from Saskatoon Nutana is saying, we've done that. So why didn't it happen this morning? What was wrong with this morning? It's happened over and over again, but it didn't happen this morning, and why not?

So the government has got caught on this and for some reason they feel that, geez, we really have to kind of start backpedalling. We can't give in to this, so let's make it, let's get it into a debatable motion when it doesn't have to be this way whatsoever.

The government could have handled this in a totally different manner. They could have simply said, we were wrong by not allowing the opposition members, be it MLAs or staff, into that technical briefing. We were wrong, and we will next time that a technical briefing is offered up to the media, you will be allowed access. That's how it could have been solved because the member from Saskatoon Nutana just said, well you were allowed into others. So yes, a precedent has been set. So why not today?

Today the argument is there's too many opposition members. Is that the argument? That was the argument by the Minister of Finance. There's too many opposition members. You get too much money, and you have too many researchers, so you shouldn't go into the technical briefing. How ludicrous is that? It has no basis whatsoever, Mr. Speaker.

But even . . . if you ask me, what makes even less sense is to have two technical briefings, to have two technical briefings — one for the media and one for the opposition staff and the MLAs. That's how we're going to address this problem. When there is precedent set in the House of Commons over and over again, and I can read through many, many different rulings by the Speaker, by Speaker Milliken. I can read through many of them . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Many of them in the last couple years. And if you want us to go back and check on

others, we can check on others from the Speaker, Mr. Milliken, of the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . yes, watch my pronunciation, Mr. Milliken of the House of Commons that has ruled on this very issue.

But more importantly there has been precedent set in this House. There has been precedent set in this building that the government for some reason feels that it can, yes agree to this technical briefing, but not this one. We'll let you into this one but, oh maybe not this one. And that really brings up a lot of suspicion, Mr. Speaker, an awful lot of suspicion.

But the most important part of this I think, and I find it quite literally offensive, that the government would stand there and try and defend the fact that they'll let media in to the technical briefing, and then they'll come out, and have the media come out and walk down the hallway and stop in front of our office and say, as I walk out, well what do you have to think about this subject?

The media has had far more information . . . It could be a Bill. It could be a technical briefing on a Bill. And the example that is used . . . and what is really ironic as I go through the one example that is in the different researching notes that I have, is the one issue that came forward in the Government of Canada in the House of Commons, was a point of privilege put forward by the then member from Melville-Yorkton, the then member from Melville-Yorkton who, if I remember correct, was Lorne Nystrom who has run for the NDP leadership countless times, now defeated. But it was an NDP member that raised the very point of privilege that this government is trying to defend. Avoid — it's trying to avoid the very thing that their brother-in-arms raised at the House of Commons, that the minister ruled in favour of, that NDP member, the member from Melville-Yorkton, Mr. Lorne Nystrom. And the Speaker ruled in favour of him because he felt the government of the day at that time was not acting appropriately, just exactly the way this government has operated today.

Now it seems like . . . you know and I would have no doubt that had the members in the government, the NDP members of this government, been patting Mr. Nystrom on the back, attaboy, Mr. Nystrom, you did the right thing, you've got to make sure that that government is open and accountable.

But now that we're back in Saskatchewan, hold on because there's that double standard. Mr. Speaker, it's called a double standard. What they expect to have operating and what access to in the House of Commons, they certainly don't expect the Saskatchewan Party and the opposition to have access to when they're in government, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute double standard if I've ever seen it, Mr. Speaker.

But as I said, and argued probably very well by the member from Yorkton-Melville, well probably argued very well, is that he did not have access to information that other people did in the media or with special interest groups, with special interest groups. So I would ask him, the member . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I just understand that the member from Battlefords, the minister of Municipal Affairs, was at that time in the House of Commons, was a colleague of Mr. Lorne Nystrom.

And I would say then, to that member, to stand up in this House and defend what the Minister of Finance has just said. Defend the arguments and rationale that the Minister of Finance has just said because, you know, I will guarantee that he would have been on the same side as that NDP member from Yorkton-Melville, Mr. Nystrom. He would have been saying, this is not acceptable that the government would not allow me as a member, at that time an MP, to have access to information that is given to the media.

But he's sitting in his chair today, and I'll be very interested after I sit down if he'll stand up and defend what the Minister of Finance has just said — that we shouldn't have access to any technical briefing that the media has access to because that would be the very same point that was argued in the House of Commons. They did not have access . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well okay, let's play with words now.

The Minister of Finance and the member from Saskatoon Nutana is saying, that's not what we said. What we're saying is, let's not deal with the issue right now. Let's send it over a committee of privilege where we have a majority on that committee, and we can maybe let that just slip right under the radar screen because we do have a majority on that committee. That's what they're saying. That's what they're saying. They're saying, let's just be quiet about this right now and let it slip under the carpet so that we can deal with it in a committee, in a committee, that, you know, you question when that committee has met so very seldom — very, very seldom, Mr. Speaker.

This issue could have been dealt with like that. This issue could have been dealt with like it's been dealt with many other times in the past, but for some reason — and I'm really, really interested to know what was in that technical briefing — because there is some reason why all of a sudden this government put on the brakes, put on the brakes, put on the censor tape. All of a sudden they stopped people from going into that technical briefing.

And with the history of some of the issues that SaskWater has been involved in — you know, perhaps SPUDCO comes to mind — I can see why perhaps they didn't want opposition members and staff in on that technical briefing, Mr. Speaker.

But I will say that this is a sad day for this House and an extremely sad day for that government who has professed open and accountable, who has set the precedent to allow people into technical briefings, not just media and not just opposition MLAs and staff, but third party interest groups allowed into those technical briefings, and so they should be. It's a sad day for the House when the Minister of Finance stands up and uses that lame arguments that he has used. I will be supporting the motion and disagreeing with the amendment.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for The Battlefords, the Minister of Government Relations.

**Hon. Mr. Taylor:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening to the debate for the last hour and 45 minutes, almost two hours, and it's a very interesting debate, Mr. Speaker. I decided about half an hour ago that I had a few

words that I wanted to say into this debate because, well I'll tell you why when I explain what I've got to say.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting, an interesting debate this afternoon. And I think that the fact that there are so many members that wish to speak, there are so many bits of information that needs to be shared back and forth, that this is exactly the reason why we have committees of the House, Mr. Speaker, and why this is an issue that should go to committee where, contrary to what the, contrary to what the member who spoke before me said, there is no majority on the committee, Mr. Speaker.

Like so much of the research across the way that's been incorrect in the last little while, Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Privileges is three and three plus the Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Privileges is an ideal forum for the way in which matters that relate to the work of this House should be dealt with. Three and three plus the Speaker, Mr. Speaker. So I do rise to support the amendment raised by the Government House Leader and to suggest to members that they poll their information together and appear before the committee.

Now that having been said, there has been reference made during the debate this afternoon to the fact that I did sit in the House of Commons. That's absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker, I was there for two full terms. I served for eight and a half years, two different governments — one Liberal and one Conservative. Mr. Speaker, I've seen the way the Speakers of the House of Commons have responded to matters of privilege. In fact I raised one or two matters of privilege in my time, and I understand the purpose of privilege.

Privilege is raised when members feel that their ability to serve their constituents is impeded or they're prevented from doing the work that they have to do on behalf of their constituents. So this is an important issue, an important debate and, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to recognize and understand that's why we have a committee of the legislature, Mr. Speaker, because it is important, and the precedents that are set have an impact for long periods of time.

[16:15]

I appreciate the fact that Speakers in provincial legislatures across Canada and the House of Commons share their information with regards to rulings and an assessment of information. And I value the work that's been done by Speaker Milliken in parliament and by yourself, Mr. Speaker, here in our Legislative Assembly.

And as a result of that information, I think it's important that all members of the Chamber, rather than base their remarks on gut feeling and gut response to one event that has occurred in this Chamber, that the members through the committee review the rulings that have taken place as well as your own ruling, Mr. Speaker, and discuss it at that level.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I said I did serve in the House of Commons. I served under both Liberal and Conservative governments. And, Mr. Speaker, I've now served for a year and a half in this Legislative Assembly. And I can tell you that — whether it was five years under a Conservative government, four years under a

Liberal government, or a year and a half under this New Democratic Party government — Mr. Speaker, I think that the way in which this government approaches the accountability to the public, the public record information sharing, we take no back seat to anyone, Mr. Speaker. This government has responded extremely well to the needs of the public and the needs of the opposition for being accountable.

One of the first things I thought of when the original motion was raised, and why I'm very happy to support the motion to amend it, was that the opposition's original motion was directly targeted at one particular department of government, not the government itself, Mr. Speaker, because of course as members opposite have indicated, that the government has been very responsive to this whole issue of sharing.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the first response that I had was that this motion was particularly targeting one department of this government when in fact, Mr. Speaker, I know my own department should be commended for the work that it's done on behalf of sharing information.

I know that the member from Rosetown-Elrose asked for a briefing by my department some time ago, and I and my department were very happy to respond, to be able to provide him with additional information that he needed on a particular piece of legislation in front of the House.

And, Mr. Speaker, just recently, within the last two weeks, my new critic the member from Wood River, has been extended an invitation to share information, a technical briefing from my own department on legislation that's about to be introduced into the Chamber.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government record on being accountable, on being transparent, on reacting positively to the needs of the public and the members opposite has been quite commendable, Mr. Speaker.

But the issue before us is one of . . . should we be discussing the ability of members of this Chamber to have access to information at certain periods of time provided by the government. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that the amendment in front of us today refer it to a committee where it can be discussed by three members of the opposition, three members of the government, with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly to determine the specifics of the individual case referenced and to discuss the go-forward position as to what would be agreeable and acceptable to the members in this Chamber.

It makes perfect sense, Mr. Speaker, to be pursuing along those lines. So I urge all members . . . Well one other thing, Mr. Speaker, before I conclude.

I did note during the debate that the opposition members were bringing forward, there was an awful lot of reference to what they thought the government was doing. And, Mr. Speaker, most of what they were thinking the government was doing had no reference on this side whatsoever. They were making reference to various things that the government was trying to do or trying not to do to prevent the members opposite from doing their job when in fact, Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a single

case where any of that were accurate.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is to take our time to work our way through this in a way that allows us to move forward carefully and thoughtfully, much like the way the government has approached the management of this legislative agenda.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank the members for the opportunity to stand here, respect the privileges of the members of this Chamber, and support the Government House Leader's motion to refer it to committee for further discussion.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to enter the debate on the motion to allow opposition members or their designated staff to sit in on technical briefings for the media.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the main gist of what I wanted to say, I do want to respond to the member who just spoke from The Battlefords who was saying that the proper thing to do was, of course, to send this matter to committee.

I would just remind the member and all members present that it is my understanding this committee hasn't met for about 14 years. So if it happens to be another 14 years before this committee does actually hold a meeting, perhaps this whole recommendation to deal with the issue may be forgotten or may be a moot point.

Mr. Speaker, had the motion, or had the amendment to the motion said that this would be referred to the committee within a week's time or something, perhaps it would have been more palatable, but the open-endedness of the amendment is certainly unacceptable and is very unfair and not proper for this Assembly to be dealing with.

In the case of the Parliament of Canada, the issue was referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs . . . That committee meets on a weekly basis when the House of Commons is in a session and those matters are dealt with very promptly, not the way things . . . matters of this type are handled within this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start out in this debate by relating an incident that happened to me when I was a Member of Parliament and I was the Agriculture critic, and Mr. Goodale, also a Member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, was the Minister of Agriculture . . . And Mr. Goodale was going to make a fairly substantial agricultural announcement. He was holding both a news conference and technical briefing here in Regina. And as the critic for Agriculture, I came to the hotel — I believe it was the West Harvest Inn — went to the door, and said that I wanted to sit in on the briefing and the news conference.

And some of Mr. Goodale's officials kind of stood in front of the door and said, no, Mr. Hermanson, you're not allowed to enter this news conference and this technical briefing.

**The Speaker:** — I just would like to remind the member that in this Assembly, you're not . . . members are not to refer to themselves even by name. I recognize the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. So these officials of Mr. Goodale's sort of stood in front of the door and told me that I was unable to enter. And I reminded the members that I was an elected Member of Parliament, I was a designated Agriculture critic, and perhaps they should change their mind.

Now this occurred before the changes were made in the House of Commons that we are using as basis to ask for a change in procedure here in Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Goodale's officials, and I think Mr. Goodale himself, had a quick little huddle and they recognized that it was improper to restrict an elected member from attending a briefing and a news conference that the media were allowed to attend.

And they said, as long as you're not here to disrupt the proceedings. And of course, Mr. Speaker, I was not there to disrupt the proceedings. I was there to garner the information so that when questioned by the media, I would have a base of knowledge to answer effectively. I sat in on the briefing and the news conference and was able to exercise my responsibilities as a Member of Parliament more effectively because the right thing was done.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I shouldn't have had to ask permission to enter that technical briefing and that news conference. The House of Commons under the leadership of Speaker Millken has recognized that, and they have changed the rules. They've clarified the rules so that this is no longer a question. That needs to happen here in the province of Saskatchewan as well.

You know the Westminster parliamentary system has a proud history, and it's a history of development, of progression, of change, of improvement. Mr. Speaker, it is now time that we improve our procedures and our process here in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to properly reflect the responsibilities of all members of the Legislative Assembly, regardless of whether they sit on the government side or the opposition side, regardless of whether they are a minister of the Crown or a backbencher, Mr. Speaker.

You know, back when parliaments were trying to become established, there was a protocol called the divine right of kings. Now, Mr. Speaker, we've gone a long ways from respecting the divine right of kings. We have come to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the common members and the common people should also have a voice and should also have rights and privileges in the parliamentary system. Mr. Speaker, that's why the federal House is called the House of Commons. It's no longer the House only of lords and the House where there's a divine right of kings.

We have progressed a long ways, Mr. Speaker. It started with the Magna Carta, and it's been a process of refinement and improvement of our parliamentary system so that we can do our job and do our job well.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition members, in doing their job, in carrying out their responsibility, need the same rights and

opportunities as members opposite, as the media, when it comes to technical briefings, whether it be briefings on the budget — that's a longstanding tradition — whether it be briefings on legislation.

You know we had the very complicated municipal Act, where it was amalgamating the urban and rural municipal Acts. A huge document came into the legislature last fall. That legislation was attempted to be rushed through this House and passed prematurely. Mr. Speaker, the opposition had to slow it down because the opposition had not had proper briefing and had not seen the legislation and hadn't enough time to do its responsible job of reviewing and of testing and of consulting on legislation before it's allowed to pass through this legislature. Mr. Speaker, being present at technical briefings, media briefings, is part of the opposition carrying out its proper responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, you would think that a responsible NDP government would want an opposition that was knowledgeable, that understood the issues, that understood the reports, that understood the legislation to be in place — to improve the quality of legislation that comes forward, to improve the quality of debate in this Legislative Assembly, and provide better service, better legislation, better Crown corporations for the people of Saskatchewan.

That's our job. That's what we're paid to do. And I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that is the position that the opposition takes. We want to do our job. We want to do our job well. We want to do our job professionally, Mr. Speaker. We need the privileges that we are entitled to, to be able to do that job and to be able to do it well.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is rather amusing and just a little bit ironic that the issue that sparked this whole debate was a report of SaskWater . It just happened to remind me that the NDP government got into an awful lot of trouble over SaskWater and their involvement in the whole SPUDCO fiasco.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we cannot roll back the clock. We can't go back to the '90s, even though I know members opposite want to roll it back even farther and go back to the '80s. We can't even roll the clock back to the '90s and look at how the SPUDCO issue was dealt with. But I guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, had the NDP government been more open, more accountable, had opposition . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. I would ask the member to confine his remarks to the procedural motion at hand. There will be plenty of time, and has been plenty of time, to debate other substantive issues. But I'd ask the member to stick with the motion or the amendment.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — I was getting to that point, I assure you, Mr. Speaker. Had the government at the time allowed the opposition to attend briefings, technical briefings, media briefings, prior to the SPUDCO fiasco, there is a better chance — not a sure chance — but there is a better chance that \$35 million of taxpayers' money in Saskatchewan would not have been wasted.

Mr. Speaker, that is the opposition's job, to prod and to poke into what the government is doing. And to be able to do that we

need the right, we need the privileges and the rights due an opposition party and due opposition members and their staff.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the NDP government opposite that if they provide the opposition their proper opportunity to attend technical briefings, media briefings, that we will do our job better and it will put them on better behaviour as well. And they won't be trying to slide things through like the way they deceived the people of Saskatchewan over SPUDCO . That is the whole purpose of giving the opposition the tools to do their job. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, the opposition needs to have access to technical briefings that media are allowed to attend and that special interest groups are allowed to attend. Mr. Speaker, any other course of action is not acceptable.

[16:30]

Now, Mr. Speaker, in our House Leader's presentation to you, he talked about the Milliken ruling. Now, Mr. Speaker, when I was a House leader in Ottawa, I had the opportunity to work with Mr. Milliken who at that time was the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. And I was always impressed with the fact that Mr. Milliken was an honest and open-minded person. Even though he sat in a different party and on the other side of the House, he was prepared to be forthcoming and to hear both sides of issues and to try to do the right thing. I will give that to Mr. Milliken.

I have a great deal of respect for the Speaker of the House of Commons. And I believe Mr. Milliken did the proper thing in allowing the improvements to be made in the House of Commons. And his position in history will be better. His standing in the progress of parliamentary reform and protection of democracy and fairness and balance in parliament will be enhanced by the position he has taken on this issue when it occurred in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, there was concern mentioned by the NDP Government House Leader that the only reason that the opposition would want to be present at the media technical briefings was so that we could somehow hear the questions that the media asked. That is really astounding. Why would the Government House Leader be concerned about any questions that anybody asks about their report or about legislation?

Mr. Speaker, if they've done due diligence, if they're convinced and confident they're doing the right thing, they should welcome, they should welcome prodding by the media. They should welcome questions by the opposition. They shouldn't mind it if the opposition and the media consult one another.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, whether we attend that media technical briefing or not, we are still free agents. We're still able to talk to the media. We can talk to Murray Mandryk . We can talk to Stefani Langenegger after the meeting. I mean they're not . . . And after the embargo is past, we can eventually get the information.

All we're being denied is we're being denied the privilege, the responsibility, the knowledge that we need to respond effectively at the time the issue is most relevant. When the reports are tabled, when the legislation is introduced, the

opposition needs to be knowledgeable and fully understand the implications of that legislation or of that report. That is crucial to the work that opposition MLAs do. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would say to you and I would say to the NDP members opposite, it is absolutely essential and it is fair and it is right that opposition members be allowed to attend the technical briefings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you would think that the NDP somehow think that the opposition would be irresponsible with this information. Well I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that if we agree to keep an embargo, we keep an embargo. We have honoured embargoes when it has come to budgets and other documents that have been provided to us before their public release.

Mr. Speaker, I sit on the Public Accounts Committee . I in fact am Chair of the committee. And we're able to work and function in a good atmosphere, a fair atmosphere where the government members are able to do their job and do it properly and where opposition members are able to carry out their responsibilities within the Public Accounts Committee.

Does the government think that the opposition will not keep its word, will not keep the embargo? Is that what they are saying? Are they saying that somehow the opposition shouldn't have the right to access to information in a timely fashion, that somehow we should have that information withheld from us as long as possible? Is that what the NDP is saying? It seems to be.

I mean either they don't believe we'll keep the embargo . . . And if we didn't keep an embargo, Mr. Speaker, then they have a case. Then there's a breach of privilege that they can raise in this legislature and they would have grounds to be successful in raising a point of privilege if we failed to keep an embargo. But that hasn't happened, Mr. Speaker, because we've been trustworthy, we've kept our word, and we've done our job well. And we would continue to do that if we were given access to all technical briefings and media briefings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we need to show proper respect for this Legislative Assembly, for the processes, the protocols. We need to show respect for all members of the House. You have told us many times that there is proper protocol and respect required. And I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that part of that proper respect is to give opposition MLAs the same access and respect that is shown to media and special interest groups by the times they are allowed to attend these special briefings.

Mr. Speaker, the member from The Battlefords said, you know, this is no problem; the member for Rosetown-Elrose asked for a special briefing — and the member is right. He did give this MLA a special briefing when I became the critic for Intergovernmental Affairs. We're not arguing about special briefings. I appreciated the minister doing that, and I suppose he didn't have to but he agreed to do that and I think it was the proper thing. For me, it was a new role that I was playing.

But we're not talking about special briefings. We're talking about scheduled, technical media briefings with embargoes, that will be of interest to all of the public of Saskatchewan, and where the opposition are expected to play a knowledgeable, a critical role because that is the way our parliamentary system works. And to deny opposition members that opportunity is to

deny them the privilege that they were intended to have in the parliamentary system. And, Mr. Speaker, there is a huge difference in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, the proof will be in the pudding as to where we go from here. As has been mentioned by one of my colleagues, the NDP has two more members in this House than the opposition. We accept that. They are the government; we are the opposition. Their job is to provide good legislation, to provide good quality service and reports from Crown corporations. Our job is to scrutinize those reports and to scrutinize legislation, and make sure that the citizens of Saskatchewan have someone making sure that the government does due diligence in all that they do.

It just so happens, Mr. Speaker, that tomorrow morning there's going to be another Crown corporation report released. And that Crown corporation report is going to be an SGI report. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that there have already been, there's already been some discussions, I believe, going on between the NDP and the opposition about whether or not we can do a better job of addressing this situation tomorrow.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, what the government should do. The government should have one technical media briefing and the government should allow opposition MLAs — if they agree to the embargo — to attend that briefing, just as if the media agreed to the embargo, they're allowed to attend that briefing.

Minister of Finance is concerned about resources. He should be concerned about resources. And the most prudent use of resources, Mr. Speaker, is if there's one briefing — if the same material is presented once, if the opposition is able to be present and hear the technical explanations for the report or the legislation or whatever happens to be the issue of the day. And, Mr. Speaker, we can be confident that there is one set of technical briefings being given to the media and another one or a shorter one or a modified one being given to opposition members.

Now that being said, I'm not sure whether tomorrow morning the government will slam the door in the face of the opposition and again breach our privilege; whether or not they will insist on having two briefings, Mr. Speaker, one especially for the opposition — and we don't know if it's going to be sanitized or whether they're going to withhold information; it's hard to know — and then a separate briefing for the media. We don't know exactly what is going to happen.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the government members to seriously consider, and I would ask the Minister of Finance to seriously consider what is the responsible role and what is the responsible course of action to take in resolving this issue.

Mr. Speaker, he can take a very partisan, a very critical and regressive approach to this issue. He can try to hoard information. He can try to make the work and the role of the opposition as difficult as possible. Mr. Speaker, he can deprive the residents of Saskatchewan of an opposition that is fully equipped to do its job, or he can do the right thing, Mr. Speaker. He can do what was done in Ottawa in the House of Commons, when the opposition was given access to briefings if they agreed to the embargo.

And I would ask the Minister of Finance, and I would ask the Minister Responsible for SGI, and I would ask all members on the NDP government side to seriously think about the big picture — think about what provides good government, think about what fairness is, and think about what transpired in Ottawa, and why it transpired in Ottawa, and why Mr. Milliken ruled in the way he did, and why the House affairs and procedures committee of the Parliament of Canada ruled the way they did on this issue.

I would ask them to seriously consider — in the morning when this briefing takes place — to allow opposition members or their designates to attend the embargoed media and technical briefing with the media. If other arrangements have to be made on a short-term basis to accommodate the briefing, I guess we, you know, we'll understand. We'll try to be co-operative. We'll try to work with these members because we want to provide good government and good representation for the people of Saskatchewan. That's our ultimate desire and our ultimate goal.

Therefore in the hopes that the government will change its position and come to its senses and think about the big picture rather than narrow-minded, partisan politics, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we give this some sober thought. And I would move that we adjourn debate.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the member for Rosetown-Elrose that debate on this motion be now adjourned.

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

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Government Whip.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of a very open and accountable government to respond to questions 954 through 972 inclusive.

**The Speaker:** — Responses for questions 954 through to 972 have been submitted.

### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

**The Speaker:** — The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

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

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

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — The motion is carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 16:42.]





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## **CABINET MINISTERS**

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Premier

Hon. P. Atkinson  
Minister of Crown Management Board  
Minister Responsible for Public Service Commission

Hon. J. Beatty  
Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation  
Provincial Secretary

Hon. B. Belanger  
Minister of Northern Affairs

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