



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

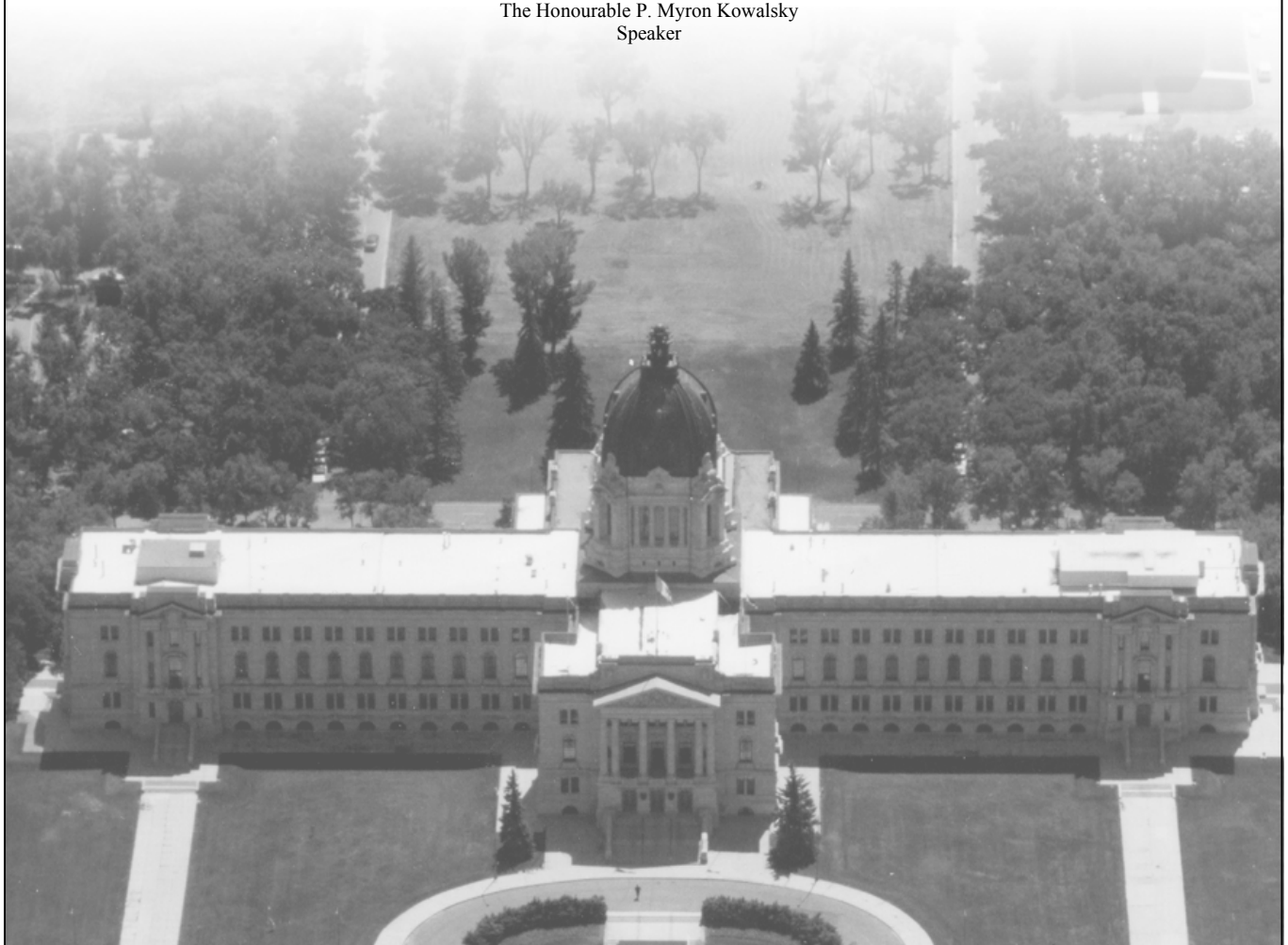
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

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Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Bakken Lackey, Brenda	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
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Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
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Heppner, Ben	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
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Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
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Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
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Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
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Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

EVENING SITTING
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Executive Council
Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

The Chair: — Order. I call to order the Committee of Finance. The first item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for Executive Council, starting on page 55 of the Estimates book. And I recognize the Premier to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to have joining members tonight Mr. Dan Perrins, at my left, who is the deputy minister to the Premier; just to my right, Lois Thacyk, chief of staff to the Premier; just behind Mr. Perrins, Tracy Sletto, director of senior management services; and directly behind myself, Bonita Cairns, who is director of administration and information services in the Department of Executive Council. I welcome our officials to the Chamber tonight.

The Chair: — Central management and services, (EX01). I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman of Committees. I'm hopeful that we're going to get some answers tonight to some questions that are important for the deliberations of this committee, but also important I think for the province, for the current issues that face Saskatchewan and also for the future of the province of Saskatchewan.

And so I want to join with the Premier in welcoming his officials here tonight and look forward to candid answers provided by the Premier.

I do want to begin with the Premier's Executive Council budget. In the provincial budget brought down by the Finance minister months ago, one of the greatest increases in public expenditure in terms of a percentage was for the Premier's communication staff. The Premier hired significantly more staff at a cost, additional cost of \$497,000 to taxpayers. Roughly a 60 per cent increase. The question that was asked of the Premier . . . rather of the Finance minister at the time, by the media, was, what is the point of these communications resources? Why does the Premier need additional resources? And the Minister of Finance said, well we need these resources to answer the written questions from the opposition.

And so the question to the Premier is straightforward, and I would like a straightforward answer. How many written questions then did the staff, the communications staff of the Premier, answer since that was the rationale for this huge increase in the Premier's budget?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there have been . . . I think anyone who observes the functioning of this legislature for any period of time will recognize there has been an unprecedented

number of written questions provided by the opposition. We believe that each of those written questions deserve serious attention and a serious response and an accurate response.

In this session to date, reported in the House earlier today, we have now received from this opposition 1,279 written questions. Those questions are coordinated through the Department of Executive Council, as has been the case I believe for many, many years.

That is one aspect of the need for greater staffing resources in Executive Council, to provide accurate, timely responses to the written questions provided by opposition, so I can speak to the Leader of the Opposition by telling him that we've now answered 1,297 questions.

Mr. Wall: — Well Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, that doesn't answer the question. The question was: how many of these written questions have been answered by these new communications resources that your Finance minister said were needed to answer written questions?

More to the point, in 2004 the number of written questions, to clarify your comment earlier just moments ago, was 905. So far this year for the budget year that we're talking about today, 374. Significantly less.

The only response your Minister of Finance could give as to why you needed this huge increase in spin doctors in communications resources in your office was to answer written questions. There have been significantly fewer in '05 compared to '04. I think the taxpayers would like to know, how many written questions did your communications staff answer?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, every written question that is delivered to the opposition on a daily basis that this House sits is coordinated through Executive Council. And we have seen over the course of this past session 1,297 written questions — an unprecedented question . . . And I mean I don't have the questions here, Mr. Chair, but some of these questions . . . for instance, one question having to do when we should turn out our Christmas lights in Saskatchewan. Well fair enough, they asked the question and we will provide the written answer.

Now, Mr. Chair, I think it is entirely appropriate to understand that communications staff in Executive Council serve the Government of Saskatchewan. These are not staff to the Premier of the province. They serve the Government of Saskatchewan, and they have responsibilities that go far, far beyond answering just written questions. This is one aspect and only one aspect of their work.

Mr. Wall: — Well my friend from Arm River, Mr. Chairman, has maybe asked a more important question here in light of the Premier bringing up the Christmas lights. Maybe the question is how many staff in the Premier's office did it take to turn off the Christmas lights, Mr. Chairman?

The point here is that we have asked, as an opposition, 370 questions this session. That's what we've answered. The only response we've received from the government as to why the

Premier would need this many more spin doctors paid for by the taxpayers was that they were going to answer written questions. So I think the taxpayers have a right to know, and I'll ask him again: how many written questions did the communications staff answer?

And I will also get the Premier to confirm this because in his previous response he said, well they just coordinate the responses, which sounds to me like they'd put a memo on the question and send it to the responsible department, send it to the department and say, would you please provide an answer. Surely 497,000 taxpayers' dollars weren't needed to do this.

Or is this about spin? Is that why these staff were needed because the Premier's image, his own image in terms of his ability to keep promises has been damaged significantly by his own actions? His government is in trouble, and so the response — instead of correcting the situation, keeping promises, and providing good government — is to hire more spin doctors. Why won't he admit that that's the reason he's blowing taxpayers' money in this way?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, let's be very clear about this because the opposition will say one thing — and we've seen it again here tonight — but here are the facts of the matter.

We get this kind of a road show attitude from the Leader of the Opposition. I thought we were going to have a serious discussion here tonight but apparently not.

So here is the fact of the matter. The communications staff that work in Executive Council today, as it has been the case for many, many years, serve the Government of Saskatchewan. They have an important role, number one, in communicating to the people of Saskatchewan policies and programs of the Government of Saskatchewan. And for that, Mr. Chair, I do not apologize, particularly with the kind of good policy and good programming that are being established by this government.

Point number two, Mr. Chair, we have been involved as a government on a variety of fronts nationally and internationally. Communication is essential in those fronts. If we're going to have our message, the message of the people of Saskatchewan and its government, if that message is going to appear in the national newspapers of Canada, in national magazines in Canada, it doesn't happen, Mr. Chair, without good communications people at work.

Just very recently I saw a very prominent article about, for instance, the Minister of Industry and Resources in a major national publication. That work is done through good communication. The policies and programs of this government are delivered through good communications people in the right location at the centre of government in Executive Council, Mr. Chair. That too is part of their responsibility.

The Leader of the Opposition on occasion has called upon this government to quote "ramp up" a variety of issues. Well the fact of the matter is you need the communications people to do just that, Mr. Speaker, and to call them, to demean professionals in the public service, as spin doctors, Mr. Chair, is simply not

true and not the fact.

Now they also serve the role of coordinating the answers that are demanded by this opposition on a daily basis, in total 1,297. He says there's been 300 since the budget. Imagine that, Mr. Chair. Imagine that.

Now he talks about the expenditure of public dollars in communication. Well maybe the Leader of the Opposition would like tell this House and the people of Saskatchewan how much his caucus office has spent on communications on behalf of himself and his caucus. What are the dollars being expended out of his caucus office for communication, particularly for TV ads that we all enjoyed a few months ago?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, let me assure the Premier that soon and very soon he will be able to ask the questions in Premier's estimates in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Now I heard the Premier's answer about the \$500,000 worth of new staff, communication staff, spin doctors for the Premier's office — political staff, political staff. I heard him say that it's their job to coordinate, to do all the communications of government. So then I would ask the Premier this: where are the savings in the departments because every single department and every single Crown corporation have communication staff?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — They're already there. So if it's the Premier's position that no, no, these new staff, significantly new staff paid for by the taxpayers to help him with his political problems are actually out there communicating the government message, then how many dollars have been saved in the departments where those communications positions have existed previously?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition of course chooses not to listen to the answer. He chooses to create his own answers to the questions. The fact of the matter is they'll say one thing, but here are the facts and those who are listening know the facts tonight.

I did not indicate that this communications branch within Executive Council does all of the communications for government. Did I say that? No. I said they serve the interest of the Government of Saskatchewan in communication to the people of Saskatchewan and far beyond this province, the essential work.

Now the Leader of the Opposition says that some day he would like to answer questions. Well why doesn't he start tonight? Why doesn't he demonstrate some openness about his own accountability over there?

Now the fact of the matter is we all saw, we all saw a number of commercials featuring the Leader of the Opposition leaning

very kindly on his desk in his office. I'm not sure what material benefit that provided to the people of Saskatchewan, all those lovely television commercials. Now maybe the Leader of the Opposition would like to explain to the House tonight and the people of Saskatchewan, number one, were those ads paid for by the taxpayers' dollars, i.e., were those ads paid for by caucus funds? And number two, how much did he expend on ads showing himself leaning on the desk, looking comfortable, as he will for a long time in the Leader of the Opposition's office?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well I'm disappointed. The Premier said he watched the commercials carefully and if he would have, he would have known I was actually sitting on the corner of the desk in the Leader of the Opposition's office.

The question, Mr. Chairman, for the Premier is this: what is it exactly that these staff are doing?

Let's review some of the staff that are in the office here, Mr. Chairman. We have a new . . . Well we have the chief of communications to the Premier. Then we have the executive assistant to the chief of communications to the Premier. Then we have the assistant chief of communications to the Premier. We have several media relations officers, a senior media relations officer, apparently a not-senior media relations officer. We have a temporary position of communications counsellor.

What do these people do? What do they do, Mr. Chairman? These are being paid for by the taxpayers' dollars. And before, before this budget year, before this budget year, the Premier's office was getting by spending a half million dollars less than he was, than he has budgeted to spend this year in his own department on spin doctors.

So in addition to answering questions in this vague, general notion about somehow coordinating communications, what additional service, what additional use are the taxpayers getting for this \$500,000 that he apparently didn't need up until this year?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, perhaps the Leader of the Opposition had an opportunity to read *The Globe and Mail* on the weekend, where *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, is doing a series on energy growth and energy programs and energy potentials in the nation of Canada. If he had an opportunity to read *The Globe and Mail*, he would see in there an important comment about Saskatchewan.

Now how does that happen, Mr. Chair? How does that happen? That happens with a good communications function within government that can talk to the people of Saskatchewan about what is happening, what is happening in this province and the great potential of this province.

[19:15]

Now you cannot, Mr. Chair, you cannot in these times survive in an economy without telling your story, without blowing your own horn. Mr. Chair, when we initiated the Wide Open Future

campaign in this government, when we initiated the Wide Open Future campaign that has been recognized nationally and internationally . . . I do not travel anywhere in Canada today that I am not met with people who talk about the Wide Open Future campaign, a campaign that takes communications people, Mr. Chair, a campaign that takes communications people.

Now the fact of the matter is that kind . . . yes, the Leader of the Opposition asks what is it that these people do. They do this on a daily basis: promoting the interests of the people of Saskatchewan, promoting the policies of this province to the nation and, Mr. Chair, explaining and informing the people of Saskatchewan about policies that benefit them from their government.

Now will the Leader of the Opposition explain what material benefit to the people of Saskatchewan has arisen from his television set of ads paid for by the public purse? Now I am told he wasn't standing by his desk. He was sitting on it or leaning on it or something. Well whatever he was doing, of what material benefit, what material benefit was that series of very expensive television ads to try and build up the image of the Leader of the Opposition? What material benefit to the people of Saskatchewan arose from that expenditure of public dollars? And by the way how much did he spend on those ads?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to say to this Premier and the members of this committee that this official opposition has most assuredly not gone to the taxpayers and got and demanded or asked for or voted itself a 60 per cent increase in the budget while it doesn't have money to index food allowance, while it doesn't have money to deal with health care issues in the province of Saskatchewan. We would never do that — not in opposition and not in government.

The Premier wants to know about the impact of those ads. I'll tell you . . . the Premier what the impact of those ads were. You'll remember, Mr. Chairman, and maybe the Premier will remember as well that in those ads we invited the people of the province, if they had a concern with this government, to contact our office so that we might be able to help them. You know what the impact of the ad was? Calls to the office of the official opposition skyrocketed. It's an indication, Mr. Chairman, of the fact that the people in this province have a lot of problems and a lot of concerns with this government and they get no answers from that Premier sitting right over there.

Mr. Chairman, it's interesting if you take a look at the history of communication staff in Executive Council, this current Premier breaks the record with his last budget — absolutely shatters the old record. You can look down this number. You can go back to 1992-93, \$450,000; and then right up to 2003-04, \$856,000; again 856,000 in 2004-05.

In '05-06 this Premier who says he can't cut the PST [provincial sales tax] — that tax that he raised last time — because he doesn't have enough money, who says he won't fund CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] for producers in this province who need it, who says he doesn't have any money to index the food allowance, he's got \$500,000

for himself, for his own budget, for his spin doctors. Why is he breaking the worst record possible, and that is the number of taxpayers blown to try to help his image?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, again they will say one thing but here are the facts. The people that work in Executive Council communications serve the Government of Saskatchewan, serve the people of Saskatchewan. And why it is that the Leader of the Opposition will not reveal to this House how much he has spent on TV ads to make himself look good is very interesting. I challenge him.

The numbers are very public, very public on what the communications budget for Executive Council are. He's quoted them. They're very public. Will he be as public with his own public funding, with his tax dollars that he's expending? How much, Mr. Chair, did the TV ads cost to put the Leader of the Opposition on the supper news trying to look good?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, the Premier has been here a long time — many would argue far too long — and he will know that the budget for the official opposition is a matter of the public record. And he will also know this — and if he doesn't know, I'll tell him — he will know that this opposition did not get an increase from this budget of 60 per cent. This opposition is not blowing money on spin doctors and on image-making, Mr. Chairman, especially when there are other priorities in this province.

I would ask this of the Premier, if part of the role of his spin doctors were to help him with his image he may, he may want to ask for his money back, Mr. Chairman, because it's not working. It's not working as indicated by the number of calls that we have received.

So the Minister of Finance apparently was wrong when he answered questions in the media as to the rationale for this because his answer was, well they need to answer written questions. We now know that's not the truth or if it is the truth, the Premier can't produce, he can't produce the number of times they've done that. So the Premier has this other general answer about things that they do.

They got an article in *The Globe and Mail*. Mr. Chairman, for a half a million dollars you could have probably bought a series of articles in *The Globe and Mail* I would imagine.

Can the Premier give for example those on social assistance for whom he will not index the basic allowance, would he give them a reason for them to want to support this kind of budget measure; why those on social assistance would want to see his budget increase by half a million dollars while he's got 10 bucks a month for them and nothing on indexation?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well someone, Mr. Chair, was kind enough to hand me the Saskatchewan Party caucus office funding according to public accounts. Now in 1998-99 that

funding was \$334,145. In 2003-04, it had grown to \$905,224. Now, Mr. Chair, I think it's understandable that an opposition caucus should . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Members, we have to allow the person putting the question to be heard. Order. We also have to allow the person to answer the question. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, by my calculation quickly that is a tripling. Now fair enough, they've elected more members. But has the opposition party, has the opposition party tripled its numbers in this House? I don't think so, Mr. Chair. I don't think so. And at the rate they're going they'll have a lot fewer members after the next election, I can tell you that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now it is presumed and it is only fair, it is only fair that as opposition caucus should receive public funding to do its work. That's only fair. And it is understood, at least it has been understood in past that some of that, in fact the bulk of it should be for research to assist members in their work in the House and so on.

But what's been going on here, Mr. Chair, it's pretty plain to see from the first set of questions. They're now using written questions to do research. That's what they're doing. They're using written questions to do research. And, Mr. Chair, what they're doing is devoting the bulk of this money to their own communications function, to their own communications function. And if you want to talk about hiring people to do communications, just look at the opposition caucus office.

So again I ask the Leader of the Opposition, be open with the public of Saskatchewan. Tell the people of Saskatchewan tonight what it is, how much you spent on television ads to make yourself look good at the opening of this session. How many public dollars were spent on your TV ads? Because, Mr. Chair, we will spend communication dollars for the benefit of the people of Saskatchewan to promote this province nationally and its potential. We don't take public dollars and try and make the Premier look good in television ads in the supper news, I'll tell you that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well yes, Mr. Chairman, if the Premier's just going to pick up any notes he gets from somewhere and use it in answers tonight, I want some of my members to send him over some notes, Mr. Chairman.

It's unbelievable that he would say, that he would question, question why the opposition budget has gone up well significantly since 1997. Of course the reason that the budget has gone up is that we are funded based on the number of MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] elected. So the reason the budget has gone up really is the NDP's [New Democratic Party] fault in the first place, Mr. Chairman. Because the more angry they get at that government, the more Sask Party members they elect until one day, one day that

opposition budget will fall significantly because it will be based on about a half a dozen NDP members sitting on this side of the House, Mr. Chairman.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well the member for Nutana is shaking her head, but she knows it's true, Mr. Chairman. She knows it's true.

Mr. Chairman, the people, the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan are not going to get any answers from this Premier. Those on social services who are waiting for indexation will not get an answer from him as to why he needs a half a million more than any Premier before him, even his predecessor Mr. Romanow, to try to spin the media, to try to improve his image. And I would offer this to him as a potential suggestion. You know, I think it was Abe Lincoln that said that truth is the best vindication against slander. So if he wants to save money on spin doctors maybe he ought to just try telling the truth to the people to the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition knows that that language has been designated by the Speaker as being unparliamentary so I would caution him in the use of that language in the future. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If the Premier wants to save money on spin doctors he ought to not say one thing and do another.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a little bit about the issue of crystal meth, and this is a very, very important issue. And I want to explore the history of the NDP's interest in the issue because we need to understand the nature of their interest in the issue of crystal meth if we are to have any faith at all as to their willingness to deal with this thing, with this problem, with this insidious drug the way that it needs to be dealt with.

It can't be about . . . simply about politics. It cannot be, Mr. Chairman. Well and the members over there are laughing about the issue. They've been laughing about it for a year. They've been laughing about it for a year.

Here is the point of the question, Mr. Chairman. Not only a number of months ago, well September 2004, his minister of Education, when we were first raising this issue in the province of Saskatchewan, in this Legislative Assembly here in Saskatchewan, his minister of Education, his Minister of Health, really wrote the issue off.

Here's some quotes from the Minister of Learning on this particular issue. He said:

“. . . let's not fall into this trap that the Opposition tried to lead us into two years ago around Ecstasy abuse, saying that the raves and the modern music were driving young people to drug use. It was ridiculous,” . . .

So by extension he's then saying, the Minister of Learning is saying that when the member for Kelvington, the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, and later the member for Saskatoon

Northwest have been raising this issue, that it was ridiculous. Now we see the Premier apparently taking this more seriously, we hope.

My question for the Premier is this: did he agree when the Minister of Learning wrote this issue off, when he called the fact that we were raising this issue ridiculous? Did he agree with his minister at the time? And if not, what did he do about it? Did he talk to his minister? And if he did agree with the minister that this wasn't a big deal, what has changed his mind?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, before we leave the question of communication spending, I ask the Leader of the Opposition one more time, come clean. Come clean with the people of Saskatchewan and tell us precisely how many public dollars he spent on television ads making himself look good. I think the Leader of the Opposition owes that to this Assembly and to the people of Saskatchewan.

And if he won't answer this Assembly, maybe he'll answer some constituents because constituents are asking me. The people of Saskatchewan have asked me how much is it that the Conservative Party leader over there spent on television ads. He owes the answer to that question to this legislature and to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now what we're seeing again tonight is an important discussion about an important issue trying to be, trying to play a little politics, I'm afraid. He's quoting ministers of this government, of course just taking a word or two out of a long quote.

At the time that we were discussing this initially, the minister of Education, the Minister of Health, myself, and I believe — all on this government bench — understand the significance of crystal meth, but in a context of the entire addictions circumstance. It is not the only challenge that we have among young people, among adults in our province. It is a particularly terrible, it is a particularly destructive substance. But in terms . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You see? The opposition from their benches sure chirp. And they suggest, they suggest that somehow I have just said it's not a serious issue. Just the opposite. You see? They say one thing and the facts are so different.

[19:30]

In those early discussions — I recall them well — there was much discussion about the need to understand the entire addiction field. There are young people in our province who are affected by cocaine in a major way. There are young people and adults in our province who are significantly affected by alcohol. Now crystal meth presents this terrible, terrible challenge because of its addictive quality, because of its accessibility, and the elements that can be used to create it. And I have publicly, publicly acknowledged the role of some members of the opposition in drawing this to important public discussion. I don't mind doing that for one moment when a member of the opposition . . . I can see a number of them who have taken this issue very seriously and brought it to public attention.

Now the fact of the matter . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well you see the Leader of the Opposition can't be quiet when he's sitting down; he can't be quiet on his feet.

Now we are taking some very significant steps and have been over the past period of time. And I expect in the discussion tonight we'll have some opportunity to talk about the work that we're doing together as a province.

Mr. Wall: — Right about the same time last September, the same Minister of Learning on the same issue of crystal meth was asked by a CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] reporter about the need for a special focus on meth — which I would assume the Premier does agree with. He's backtracking a bit now here even though at the Western Premiers' Conference he said he was going to make it an issue. He said he was going to host a conference. We're going to ask more about that. But here's what Minister of Learning had to say. He went on to say:

I have yet to see any convincing argument as to why this drug is any more important for us to fight than any of the others or why we should pull resources away from those others to fight to deal with this one.

First of all I mean the response is ridiculous because there isn't a legislator or a addictions worker in the province that was saying pull resources away from anything to deal with this crystal meth. They were saying this is uniquely insidious; deal with it. Get some resources in place to deal with it from an awareness standpoint and from a treatment standpoint and from an education standpoint. The government dragged its feet and dragged its feet. These are the words of the Minister of Learning — this was no big deal. It was just one of many drugs.

Now I ask the Premier again: did he agree with the minister at the time? And if he didn't agree with him at the time, what did he do about it? If he did agree with him, when did he change his mind? We welcome any interest. We're still concerned that it's frankly still more about words than it is about action, but we welcome the interest nonetheless because it hasn't been there for a year. Does he agree with the Minister of Learning? What is the position of the government when it comes to crystal meth?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The position of government often stated in this House and often stated publicly, Mr. Chair, is that crystal meth has terrible potential to affect the human life. We understand its accessibility. We understand the addictive quality of this substance, and we'll have opportunity to talk about the things that we are doing to take this on.

This is not to say that residents of our province, young people particularly, are not affected by other very addictive substances, not to say that cocaine does not remain a very significant, very significant challenge among young people in our province. And I defy any member of the opposition to say it isn't. It's not to say that perhaps the most addictive and destructive product still in our province is alcohol, affecting more lives, more families, more young people perhaps than any other.

Now we are joining forces with communities, with educators, with law enforcement. We're providing legislative tools. We're providing programming. We're providing the leadership now in Western Canada.

The fact of the matter is, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, that when we went to the Western Premiers' Conference, this

was not on the agenda. It was not on the agenda. We put it on the agenda. And we are bringing together in this city, in days soon to come, the first such meeting of its kind where we're bringing together all of the Western provinces. And I'm pleased to report tonight we are bringing also some American expertise from the States into this meeting.

We are going to take this on, not just as a province but as a western Canadian unit and now drawing on some of our American friends and neighbours. We take this very, very seriously. We've provided legislation — tools — to our law enforcement officers where they can tackle some of those who are providing these substances to the people of Saskatchewan and to our youth. We're providing new helpline programs for our youth.

And we're learning as we go — as we all are, I think, right across Canada, right across North America — on finding the most effective education tools to prevent and treatment tools and enforcement tools to get at those who are profiting in this substance of destruction.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, it's hard to believe, frankly, that the Premier would say that he, his government is leading on the issue of meth. Last September when the member for Kelvington-Wadena attended a western Canadian conference, came back and reported to the media what she had found and was advocating certain measures, certain ideas that our province should pursue, what did the Minister of Learning then say? He said quote, "To take a one-off situation as the Sask Party suggests I think is very short-sighted and ill-advised." At that very same time while that minister was saying that, the province of British Columbia and the province of Alberta had a dedicated province-wide strategy for crystal meth. It was in place last year. We are behind.

The conference is welcomed, Mr. Chairman, but we are behind — not just with respect to education and awareness about meth. And if you have a doubt of it, I hope you tuned or one of your spin officials were able to monitor the news talk radio program yesterday where the member for northwest was speaking as a parent of an addicted child and talked about six funerals since January in Saskatoon directly linked to crystal meth. That is a serious issue.

We are behind. We are behind in education and awareness, and we are behind in treatment. Because just as the Premier was on his feet a moment ago saying that we're leading the country, leading Western Canada on this issue, we know that not days ago the Premier, the re-elected Premier of BC [British Columbia] announced a \$1 billion treatment and addiction initiative for his province.

That's the question for the Premier. Saskatchewan, under his government, under his party, under the NDP, closed a dedicated youth addictions treatment facility. It was called Whitespruce. The NDP came to power and they shut it down. They have not replaced it. It's been a piecemeal process of a bed here and a bed there and integrated with other units.

I have a question for the Premier. What plans does he have for this province for addictions treatment for young people, dedicated to young people and dedicated to the unique

challenges around meth addiction and addictions around other new drugs that our youth are facing?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, before the Leader of the Opposition speaks so disparagingly about the people that are at work providing addictions treatment for young people in Saskatchewan, I wonder, has he visited the Calder Centre? Has he visited the Calder Centre? Has he visited the programs? Has he talked to the workers on the ground?

Have we reached the level of service we need? Absolutely not. But to suggest that the people that are working today in the communities, in institutions across this province are not doing good work is not acceptable, Mr. Chair. It is simply not acceptable.

Now the fact of the matter is we have work to do. I have appointed, Mr. Chair, you well know, a member of this legislature to serve as Legislative Secretary to look at crystal meth and all addiction programming in this province, particularly for young people. This member too has been very present in the media, very present in the public, is doing some very, very good work. I too am looking forward to this conference where we're bringing together for the first time this level of political leadership, not just at a provincial level but at a western Canadian level, and now bringing in some legislators from the United States to be part of this because it is not an issue that is unique to Saskatchewan. It is not an issue unique to Saskatchewan; we know that. It's being faced across the continent. And so the more that we can work together, the better.

We have work to do. We have work to do in education. Just yesterday I had an opportunity to review some work that's going into a new public education campaign, particularly directed at youth and their parents. I pass by a number of schools here in Regina. I see the billboards out in front talking about the educational events that are happening in the schools today around crystal meth, around addictions, around the whole area of drug addiction and abuse.

We have work to do. We have work to do to discover the best models of treatment. Some of them will be in-patient. Some of them will be in community. We have seen the work of the Minister of Community Resources as she has struggled with the legislation she has. We've had debate in this House about legislation, potential legislation. I think we're all struggling with this, Mr. Chair. Not one of us have all of the answers, but we're all struggling.

But to suggest, as the Leader of the Opposition I'm afraid did in his opening comment, that the work that's going on in our communities and in our institutions today is not good work, is just false. There is good work happening in our province. We need to do more.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, nobody, nobody on this side of the House is disparaging those in the public system or those who are working with faith-based and community-based organizations to deal with addictions. Nobody on this side of the House is disparaging their efforts. People on this side of the

House have been meeting with those individuals, Mr. Chairman. People on this side of the House have been working with them to identify solutions, Mr. Chairman.

And a solution that's oft identified is a dedicated youth treatment facility. We had one once. This NDP government closed it. I asked the Premier a question. When will this government address the need for a dedicated youth treatment for addictions in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, when we look at the whole addictions treatment centre, I am of the view there will need to be further in-patient, residential treatment opportunities as we build on the base of community-based opportunities. It's not one or the other. I believe there will be need for more. We have not come to decision. We have the work of the Legislative Secretary. We want to be sure that when we provide that in-patient treatment facility that it will be effective.

Now those who know the circumstance around the Whitespruce Treatment Centre, and I know it well, will know that for all of its best efforts . . . and by best efforts I mean efforts that were put into Whitespruce long after we became government because I was much a part of those efforts. Our best efforts and best efforts of the community of addiction treatment in this province could not find Whitespruce effective to the needs of a large number of youth.

We had pods that were simply never opened for a . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well one of the members across the way says, well fix it. Well the fact of the matter is we had the very best people available to us at that time establish programming of Whitespruce. It wasn't the appropriate spot.

We need to be sure that when we put the in-patient work, we need to be sure it's right. And we're going to make sure of that, Mr. Chair, with the work of the Legislative Secretary, with the work of the community in Saskatchewan and, if I may say, drawing the expertise from right across the continent.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, if the government of the day . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And we heard the member from Northcote, P.A. [Prince Albert] Northcote chirping and saying, well it wasn't this member that was the Premier at the time when they closed Whitespruce. He sat at the cabinet table, and so did the member for P.A. Northcote sit at the cabinet table when they shut down Whitespruce. And he's proudly nodding his head.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Now this Premier can say that it wasn't, well it wasn't quite the right facility, so we just shut it down. Then did they replace it? Did they replace those youth treatment beds all these years later? No they didn't. And now we have "Slim" Thorpe in Lloydminster reporting that they turn away 60 to 100 young people every single month.

We can't wait while this Premier dithers, Mr. Chairman, on this issue. We can't wait for him to do his hard work and to struggle along and to face all the challenges. We need, Mr. Chairman, for this Premier to tell the parents of this province when they can expect a youth addiction treatment facility in the province

of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there are tonight in-patient facilities for youth in the province of Saskatchewan. I don't want any of the general public to be misled by the Leader of the Opposition here. There are, there are facilities available tonight in the province of Saskatchewan.

And just to be sure that the other observations of the Leader of Opposition don't go unanswered, the fact of the matter is the Whitespruce Centre is fully utilized. It is not utilized today for youth alcohol treatment. It is being fully utilized. It now houses . . . I believe it continues to house the Yorkton district health, Sunrise Health Region. And it has provided, Mr. Speaker — and I know about this too because I established it there — it has provided some very effective young offender treatment facility in there.

So it's not as if the facility is closed up or boarded up or not being used. It is being fully utilized. It just wasn't sufficient to the task of youth addictions at that time. And the best, the best work from the best people in Saskatchewan simply could not make it function. So we're making a very good use of it for young offender treatment and facility, and we're using it for the health region, the health region administrative offices.

[19:45]

I again say that we are going to solve this through the combination. It's not going to be through a single treatment facility. It's going to be through in-patient treatment facilities. It's going to be through community-based services.

But surely also, Mr. Chair, we have to recognize the need for public education and prevention. Surely the best track, the best track is to try and prevent our young people from engaging in the use of this substance in the first place. That takes some significant education and it also takes, Mr. Chair, in my view some very significant activity on stopping those who are profiting from trade in this destructive substance.

Now we've put together legislation in this House, and passed it, to give our police forces much more significant power to deal with some of these people. We need to understand what's happening in terms of interprovincial or in fact international trade in these, in these substances. We've called upon the federal government to stiffen the penalties for those who deal in crystal meth, to raise it from a schedule III to a schedule I. So at a minimum those who are trafficking in crystal meth should be punished in the same regard as those who traffic in cocaine or heroin. It's just as addictive and perhaps even more dangerous.

We need to understand what's happening about the ingredients that go into the production of crystal meth. Have the controls been sufficient, particularly around chemical availability — veterinarian supply, farm chemical availability? We're participating with the pharmacists of Canada through the Meth Watch program. We've taken leadership in participating with the pharmacists of Canada in the Meth Watch program.

So it cannot be a single track, Mr. Chair. It cannot be a single

track. We need this breadth of approach. That's what we're participating in because we do see this. I think all of us in this room see this as a very significant issue.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, you know what is absolutely fascinating? In June of '04 the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy was asking the Premier similar questions about youth addictions treatment in the province of Saskatchewan. And here's what his answer was a year ago, June 14, 2004:

My view is there is room for debate on whether or not we are providing sufficient resources for either detox or . . . [rehab] resources that are in-patient . . .

But I would not want anyone to be left with the impression [that] there are not services available today for young people in Saskatchewan for both detox and rehab work.

Then he goes on further to say:

Should we be looking at further in-patient treatment for youth? I think . . . [that's] a good question . . .

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

Mr. Chairman, that is exactly the same answer he gave moments ago in this Assembly, one year later. Except do you know what has changed, Mr. Chairman? What has changed is that people are going to funerals in Saskatoon linked directly to crystal meth. That's changed. What has changed is the number of people being turned away from community-based organizations that provide addictions treatment to young people is going up 60 to 100 a month at "Slim" Thorpe. That is what has changed. The only thing that hasn't changed is the Premier's answer: well it's an important question but people shouldn't be concerned that there isn't treatment available.

Well people are concerned. Parents are concerned. And I would add, Mr. Chairman, that when Mothers Against Meth voice those concerns, they're not being hysterical as some MLAs have suggested.

Mr. Premier, people deserve an answer and they deserve an updated answer. They deserve a timeline when they can expect youth addictions treatment services in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, again I say there are, there are needs in our province that are yet unmet. There are significant resources now available, significant resources. They are needs yet unmet. We are going to meet those needs.

We are going to meet them in combination of working with the community. We are going to work with the people who are the best trained and the most knowledgeable about the most experience. We're going to talk to people who have lived with the problem, both as young people or as their parents. The work

of the Legislative Secretary will report this year. We'll have some very significant findings there. We're hosting this very important conference. And I repeat, we are going to build the best system that we possibly can in this province.

But again I do not want the impression left, as I didn't a year ago, as I don't tonight, that there are not tonight facilities and programs available in this province. And we've made those programs and facilities more accessible now through a simple telephone line, widely advertised, where families or parents or individuals' friends or others can simply call tonight on that line and get immediate direction, help, and counsel in the right direction.

There are facilities; there are programs. Have we met the need? No we have not. There is work to do but I do not want any impression left that there are not appropriate and helpful facilities and programs available tonight as near as a telephone call away now.

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

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the Premier and to your officials. Mr. Premier, not too long ago, probably about a month ago I was delighted to hear that the Premier was going to host a conference on crystal meth in this province, because at that time I wanted to believe that the Premier had changed his mind and became really involved in the issue, knowing that we had to do something in our province because there were young people dying.

The member from Saskatoon Northwest said a few minutes ago that six young people have died in Saskatoon this year, year 2005, from the drug crystal meth. That's just in the city of Saskatoon. I know some reserve areas, Mr. Premier, through the Chairman, that has lost three young people in the last eight weeks. And, Mr. Chairman, we've had the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] chief talk about the reserve problem with crystal meth right across this whole province.

And in the last year we've had families calling us, not saying that we're going to meet with them or we're going to study or we're going to do something. They're coming to us right now saying, our kids are involved in a drug and we can't help them any more. And they can call somebody if they want to when they're in a crystal meth haze, or maybe some family member can call, but first of all there's nothing that's going to make that child go in there. It's one of the things that we said we had to do was enable parents to be parents and have the right to parent. That's not something that this government has allowed parents to do.

And the other thing that we have not done in this province is use some of the educational material that's available in Alberta, that's available in other provinces. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We can go to our neighbouring provinces and say, let me see what you've got; I want to work with it.

We know that we've talked to the federal government about scheduling the drugs. It's not something that this government has done. We know very well that crystal meth is in the same category as marijuana. That's not helping us cut back on the traffickers. That's not something this government has actually

done.

We have not got a treatment centre for the young people that we need so desperately. We have got parents that cry on the telephone saying, what are we going to do? We're going to take them to a centre and put them in the same centre where there's a 38-year-old drunk and we've got a 16-year-old meth addict. They don't need the same treatment. They don't have the same counselling. They don't need the same beds. They need somebody that's listening to them. And we can't wait any longer for that, Mr. Premier, and Mr. Chair. We've studied this and studied it and studied it and time for studying is well over.

So, Mr. Speaker, the addiction workers that we have, Mr. Chairman, the addiction workers that we have in this province that have called to us, they've called the member from Weyburn. They've called the member from Saskatoon Northwest. They've called our leader and every one of our MLAs because they know that there's problems out there. And those addiction workers say, we don't know where to go any more. We're helping everything we can do but some people can't be helped with outpatient treatment. Some can. And the addiction workers work overtime. They work on their own time. They call on Sundays. They try and help these young people whenever they can, but they can't do it all themselves.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier talked about a conference and I remember the Health minister talked about a conference that happened with the chemical workers and he said, we brought in the leading expert on crystal meth. The we was the addiction chemical workers. It had nothing to do with government. There was not one penny of government money in that conference. The workers themselves saw a need and they paid for it; the government tried to take credit for it. So now we're going to have another conference. And I'm delighted we're going to have a conference. But what we want to know is specifics. We want to know when the conference is, where the conference is, and the actual agenda of the conference.

We don't want to have a bunch of people who are in a suit, who have never talked to somebody who has used crystal meth, have never talked to a parent who is dealing with their children who have used crystal meth. Are they going to have a voice at that conference so when a decision is made, it is really made that is going to affect and help our children? We do not just want to have just a suit telling kids what to do.

The member from Saskatoon Northwest can tell you when him and his daughter go out and speak to parents and to children, they have an impact. It's not a legislator, it's not some elected person or even some policeman that has an impact on them. It is the people who have used, the people who have been addicted, and the people whose lives have been torn apart. So before I can get real excited about this conference I want to hear when, where, and what are you really doing for the children of our province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to the member's very specific questions. The final detail is being worked out about the conference. It's been somewhat of a challenge to secure the ministries of Health,

Justice or attorney generals, Public Safety, from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the three territories. And now we're involving the attorneys general of North Dakota and Montana and potentially Idaho, given my understanding that the Governor of Idaho leads the crystal meth work that's being done among the Western governors.

To put this varied and large group together has not been simple to find a date for everyone that's acceptable but we have settled on Friday, June 10. The conference will be here in Regina. It will be at the Hotel Saskatchewan. I'm told that's the room that we could get that was available to meet the needs because these folks will be bringing with them their most senior public officials, the deputy ministers in the case of the . . . June 10. June 10. Somebody over there seems to not . . . June 10 here in Regina . . . [inaudible interjections] . . . Well you see, Mr. Chair, you try and have a reasonable discussion and all you get is hollering from the bench over there.

Now that conference, as I said, will involve that group of individuals. I've been asked by the Western premiers to chair this gathering. We will be looking at essentially three components: the component of enforcement, the component of legislation and that is important for legislators to look at that very thing. And this will include some of the work that we've done in terms of powers to policing. We'll be looking of course at the private member's Bill from Alberta, all of the legislative aspects. We will be looking at, equally, presentations around the educational work that's being done in our various jurisdictions to seek out best practices and learn from each other. And we will be looking at what can be the most effective treatment models for those who have found themselves addicted or who are abusing crystal meth specifically.

We will be inviting senior police officers to present and we will be inviting senior members of the treatment community to present to us as well. Now this is going to mean a very, a very full day. A full day — one day. The members seem shocked that it's one day. Well the fact of the matter, Mr. Chair, is to assemble this group is a very significant gathering. The leadership from this group of course will go far beyond this meeting, Mr. Chair.

Now I want to recognize the work that the member from Saskatoon and his daughter have been doing publicly because I agree with the member who just spoke. This is as essential as anything we might do as legislators. We have important roles as legislators, as leaders of public policy, but our work alone is not sufficient. And the work that's being done by those who have experienced addiction, who will speak to young people, to young people, we applaud that work.

We've seen not only in crystal meth, we've seen it very recently with the example of a young man here in Regina who through an addiction to alcohol took another young person's life. And he since that experience has devoted himself to speaking to other young people. He, with the family involved, have created a very, very powerful video that's now being used in our schools. This work is something that we as legislators and a conference, that's not the work we can do. It's essential work. We need to team and partner with this whole community as we take on not just crystal meth but the whole question of addictions.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess the question I first have to ask the Premier that if we hadn't asked the question tonight would we have heard about this conference, number one? And number two, who is invited to the conference?

Mr. Premier, I'd just like to tell you that since January . . . in December when my daughter and I went public with our issue and I committed publicly that I would get involved and create some entities to assist parents and families, together with a lot of good people in Saskatoon, Families Against Meth was formed. Families Against Meth is growing. It has over 80 parents. It meets twice a month. First Tuesday of every month is family grieving session; third Tuesday of every month is a session where we bring in speakers.

[20:00]

We didn't stop there, Mr. Premier. We set up an education program in schools. We've been to over 10 schools in the province. We spoke to thousands of children. We had 200 parents out in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan. We had last night at Balfour Collegiate here, about 150 parents out, spoke to over 1,000 students.

But we didn't end there. We have set up a website on drug addictions, and we don't speak just of crystal meth. We talk of all addictions. We set up a website to inform parents of information on crystal meth, on various substances, and where they can go.

We've set a library up. The library consists of reports, videos, presentations, documentation.

We've set up groups that can go out and meet with parents in order to comfort them and get them through this process. We have set up a training program for parents called PRIDE [Parent Resource Information Drug Education] Saskatoon. This Friday and Saturday we will be doing the first program which was sold out immediately to 50 families. This is a seven and a half hour, comprehensive program that was purchased by PRIDE Saskatchewan from the United States where it's been shown to over 12,000 people . . . 12 million people.

We will be taking this presentation to the mayors' conference in Humboldt in June and offering it to every community in the province free of charge.

On Monday of next week, the 30th, I will be meeting with a group of 50 individuals to work to double the size of Teen Challenge, an addiction facility centre in Allan, Saskatchewan. We will go from 10 to 34 beds before the end of the summer.

Mr. Speaker, I've sat on Saskatoon Tribal Council addiction centre when the member from Sutherland arrived, gave your greetings. Over 40 people in the room talking of addictions. After his greetings he left the . . . greetings from you, sir, he left the meeting and we all looked at each other. We spent the next two and a half hours discussing addiction problems and solutions. And I question that if the member from Sutherland

really wanted to learn something about addictions, maybe he should have stayed.

Mr. Speaker, this has been done just by parents since the end of January. When is the government going to do something for the youth of our province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, let me repeat. Let me repeat. I and members of this government and I believe the general public in Saskatchewan recognize the work that the member opposite has done. We recognize the work that's happening with parents and happening in communities.

It is exactly my point, Mr. Chair. Government alone is insufficient to this task. It does require the commitment of those who have lived with addiction and can speak from personal experience. It takes the commitment of parents and families and we've seen it. This is not the first time, Mr. Chair, not the first time. And I applaud those efforts.

There is a role for the legislator and there is a role for the public. And the role of course is in providing programming as we do through the health regions, through our Health budget, through the significant, significant dollars that are being expended in this province in terms of addiction treatment.

Just so that there's no misunderstanding, here are the exact numbers, Mr. Chair. There are tonight in Saskatchewan 248 alcohol and drug treatment beds — 248. That's 164 in-patient beds, that's 75 detoxification beds, and another 9 long-term residential beds. And those beds are contained in 13 facilities accessible around the province. In addition to the in-patient beds, Mr. Chair, there are 50 regional health authority and community based outpatient services.

Are these sufficient to the task? No. I believe we've concluded there is yet work to be done and I've said that tonight. There is an important role for the Government of Saskatchewan; there is an important role for the public sector. But there is equally, if not an equal if not even more important role for the kind of work that the member, his family, and other individuals in our province and their families are doing. And I applaud them for doing it.

The Chair: — Recognize the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, the problem here is that the lion's share, the great majority of the work that is being done is being done by parents, and is being done by community volunteers, is being done by communities in the province without leadership from this Premier or this government, Mr. Chairman. That's the problem.

But I am alarmed tonight again by the Premier announcing in this Assembly, and only after we asked him the question, that the conference has been set — which is I mean the conference itself is a positive development — but it's been set for June 10 and there's an agenda and there's an invitation list and they already know who's going to be presenting.

And you know, Mr. Chairman, what is shocking is that had we

not asked the question tonight, were they going to invite the member for Kelvington who has been out in schools, eight schools, and on First Nations reserves with PowerPoint presentations, doing the work, meeting with addictions workers, able to and willing to help this government if they would but ask, were they going to invite her — when would she find out?

When would the member for Northwest find out, or more importantly the groups that he represents, the groups that are already coming together in Saskatoon, the parent-to-parent training, the PRIDE organization. These people might be interested in the conference, but would they have known about it if we don't ask the question in the legislature? So the Premier will excuse us if we doubt his sincerity on these issues.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — If we doubt that he means it. Or is it more about politics for this Premier? Why in the world . . . When was this Premier going to invite or consult with members on this side of the House who also have something to offer on the issue about the conference? And more importantly, when was he or the Minister of Health going to consult with those groups in Saskatoon who are already taking action because their government will not?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, they say one thing and here are the facts. It was, it was today. It was today, Mr. Chair, that we were able, that we were . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. I would caution members to use parliamentary language in their . . . Order. Order. Would the member for Rosthern please come to order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it was . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it was earlier this day I was able to sit down with officials and we finally have secured an opportunity, a day when the majority of those ministries of Health, Justice, and Public Safety from across Western Canada can be in Regina. The date established is June 10, June 10.

Now the fact of . . . Now the fact of the matter is the member from Indian Head is shouting from his seat. Why doesn't he get on his feet and ask the question if he's got a question?

The fact of the matter is this. We went to the Western Premiers' Conference. We put the issue of crystal meth on the agenda, Mr. Chair. As a result of that, the premiers of Western Canada, including if I may say, the Premier of Alberta, the Premier of British Columbia, the Premier of Manitoba, the premiers of the three territories, agreed that there was some appropriate work that could be done by bringing together representatives of government.

This was never intended to be a public conference of an educational value. It was intended to bring together leaders of government to explore vehicles by which we interprovincially

and territorially could deal with some of the issues as legislators. We've been able to secure the participation of North Dakota and Montana, and we're reaching out to Idaho. That's the goal. That's the goal.

Now the fact of the matter is, the official letters of invitation will go tomorrow because we established finally the day in the agenda today. Now I understand that the Leader of the Opposition may not have any experience in this regard of what it takes to try and pull together an interprovincial and now an international group of legislators. He may have no experience in this regard.

It is not quite as simple as the Leader of the Opposition would have us believe, but we're doing the work. We're doing it diligently. And the conference will be here. The meeting will be here in Saskatchewan, in Regina, on June 10.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, why didn't the Premier contact and take up the offer of the member for Kelvington and the countless offers from the member for Northwest who have some considerable expertise and knowledge in the issue of meth and addictions treatment? Why did he not contact them to get their input as to the conference to make it the best possible conference we could possibly host here in the province?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, again I want to be clear. This is not an educational public conference. This is an opportunity to bring legislators, the leaders from our Western provinces and territories and now joined by some of our American friends together as legislators to look at public policy.

Now it is, I mean . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the members over there, you see, they won't stand up and ask questions. Oh no. They'll shout from their seats ad nauseam, but they don't want to take an issue seriously.

The fact of the matter is — the fact of the matter is — we are bringing these people together. Early on in my discussions with the officials who are doing the work of putting this together, I indicated to my officials that I sought to have a representative of the opposition to participate in this conference as an observer — that is the fact — as an observer because the fact of the matter is, the fact of the matter is the legislators from North Dakota and from Montana are going to participate as observers.

This is a function of the Western premiers. It is a function of the Western provincial and territorial governments to sit down as legislators, as government leaders, to work together. Now if the opposition doesn't find that acceptable, well that's just too bad I guess. Because we're going to move ahead. We're going to bring these provinces together. We're going to bring them together here in Regina and we're going to look for joint initiatives.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, what the opposition doesn't find acceptable — or maybe the better way to put it is what we, what I simply don't understand — is why the Premier, not to sit at the table at the conference as a full participating member but why this Premier, who acknowledged earlier on anyway the work and the expertise of at least two members on this side of

the House, why he would not consult with them on the planning for the conference, on the different issues that are present before the province. Why wouldn't he do that? That's the question.

Yes, the member for Northcote just heckled from his seat, well that would be a first. And it would be a first, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — Order. Order. There's a lot of extra conversations going on. I'm not able to hear the member who has the floor. I recognize the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — The member for Northcote heckled from his seat. He said, well that would be a first — meaning the government consulting with other people in the province who don't share the same partisan interest. And he's right. It would be a first.

Maybe the answer as to why the Premier wouldn't at least . . . I mean it's not respect or decency, it's just . . . it would be good conduct. It would be to ensure the conference is as successful as possible to tap on any expertise that's available in this Assembly regardless of where members sit.

But maybe the answer to the question as to why he wouldn't do that came from the member from Nutana who chirped from her seat, because we're the government. That's what she said, Mr. Chairman. Is that also the Premier's view? Why would he not, why would he not take the time to consult with colleagues of his in this Assembly who have a non-partisan interest in this issue and also something to offer, also some ideas with respect to issues that territorial and provincial governments have to deal with and the priority in which they must be dealt?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, while I recognize both the passion and the commitment and some of the expertise that exists in a limited number of members opposite, the fact of the matter is they don't have all the wisdom. And there are very able, wise people who provide us stable, good advice — whether it's from the Department of Health in our government or the Department of Justice or whether it's the people that are working in communities — who we have relied on to work on this agenda.

Let me again say, Mr. Chair, this is not a public educational conference. This is a conference trying to bring together the governments of the Western provinces and territories. That's what this government is . . . that's what this conference is about.

And, Mr. Speaker, no such plan was in place before we went to the Western premiers' meeting in Lloydminster. No such plan was in place. It evolved because this government took it there and brought it here. That's how it happened. This is a function of the Western premiers but we are not . . . I am not extending to observer status invitations to members of oppositions from other provinces who I expect also would have some expertise.

[20:15]

We are offering invitations as observers, as I said, to some of our American colleagues and from the beginning I've said to my officials we need to provide an opportunity for a representative from the Saskatchewan opposition, the Saskatchewan Conservative Party, to be part of this as an observer. This Mr. Chair, is unheard of, if I may say, in my

experience of Western premiers' functions or ministerial functions.

Now let's draw a parallel to this. Some years ago we came together as Western provinces and territories and worked on FAS [fetal alcohol syndrome] work and have done extremely important and joint work on FAS. That's what's being done here.

This is not, this is not a program to provide a public access to education. It is for governments to sit down together and attempt as best we can to work together around a very difficult issue.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, to the Premier on a different issue . . . And we look forward to any correspondence from his office with respect to this conference, and I can assure the Premier that our members will participate in whatever way is most constructive for the conference. But I would put on the record our disappointment with this Premier in what appears to be a lack of sincerity in recognizing the ability of members because they happen to sit opposite from him with a different party. I think that's the problem here and that's very, very unfortunate.

Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, I would like to move to the issue of the basic allowance. This government, again pressured by the official opposition, took a small step forward by increasing the basic allowance by an amount of \$10 per month.

But step two of our plan was to index that allowance — to index it to protect it against inflation, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'd like to ask the Premier why in this budget he did not do that, why he failed those who are on social assistance who deserve at least the indexation of that allowance, and when he plans to get that done.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the work that this government has done around poverty issues, around families and individuals on social assistance, didn't begin with this budget year. In fact there has been very, very significant work done over the last number of years in addressing issues faced by families and individuals living in poverty.

That began a program of which this government is extremely proud and of which I am extremely proud, the Building Independence program, which has invested in Saskatchewan families in both educational opportunities, in health benefits, and in support to families to an extent that we have very, very significantly lowered the caseload of families receiving social assistance in our province.

The Minister of Community Resources and Employment has spoken to these issues, has spoken to these issues in the House about the dramatic, the dramatic change for families in our province. I have met many, many of those families who today have pride in their independence, pride in their employment, pride in having moved from dependence to independence. That has been a significant goal and I would argue a significant accomplishment of this government.

That has come through new programs, new support, entries into education. We've brought down this welfare wall so that now if a person on social assistance with children can secure

employment, we encourage that employment, we reward that employment. At a time when we inherited this file, I tell you we were punishing people.

We have invested significantly and in this budget even more significantly in terms of housing — in terms of housing — for we know that to provide good quality housing for a family is essential to the health and well-being of that family and, if I may say, of that neighbourhood and oftentimes of the school population. Stability in housing has been essential.

We just in the course of this session announced a \$10 million program of renter rebate to assist those who are in rental accommodation and receiving social assistance to improve, improve that housing for those individuals and equally to provide opportunity for some of them to move into home ownership because home ownership also can provide a basic level of independence.

For many years, Mr. Chair, there has not been a raise in the basic rate. There have been some small adjustments but not a raise to the basic rate. This is the first year in many years that every individual on social assistance has received an increase in his or her benefits. We're proud of that, Mr. Chair, we're proud of that.

We know we still have work to do. But every individual in this province on social assistance this year as a result of this budget . . . which by the way the opposition votes against. They call for these kind of programs, they call for these kind of increases but as soon as it comes to a vote, they vote against it, which is an interesting, which is an interesting proposition. When you call for something, it's presented in the budget, then you vote against it. Well that . . . I don't know how that works, Mr. Chair, but I guess they can explain that to the people on social assistance.

Now other aspects of providing for people on low income will of course have to do with minimum wage and we will be in the days and weeks ahead of course dealing with minimum wage in our province, as we do on a regular basis. Now when we approach the minimum wage, I wonder what the reaction of the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition will be. Will they support an increase in minimum wage for those people who are working poor in our province? Will they do that?

Mr. Chair, we're very proud of the work that we've done on behalf of families in Saskatchewan. There are new opportunities and programs for the disabled in social assistance. These are new programs. There's new housing programs. We've moved large numbers of people off of social assistance from dependence to independence. And this year, Mr. Speaker, for the first . . . Mr. Chair, for the first time in many, many years an increase that applies to the basic levels for every recipient of social assistance in our province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well it's not a surprise at all, Mr. Deputy Chair, that the Premier would say something that wasn't quite the case, because the Premier will know clearly in advance of the budget that we called on this government to provide an increase in the basic allowance but also that they would index it, that they

would index it for inflation. And that's the question. Will the Premier do that? Will the Premier index the basic allowance for inflation? It's a simple question. Maybe he could try to answer that for us.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, in this budget we have not indexed the benefits for social assistance. That is the fact of the matter. It's in this budget and that's the budget . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — So, Mr. Chair, there was not an indexation of the benefit in this budget. We have made some choices. You can't do everything in one budget. We've made some choices.

We've chosen to increase the basic allowance. We've chosen to put very significant new resources in this budget into housing, into rental housing and other forms of housing supports for low income; and not only for low income but for seniors as well, for the disabled. So you have to make choices. We've chosen to put some new resources, significant new resources into housing. We've chosen to put a basic increase.

We did not choose in this budget to index. It's a choice that we would have to consider as each budget year unfolds with priorities.

I just ask the Leader of the Opposition, how is it that he can stand in this House, ask for an increase in social assistance and then stand up and vote against it? How can he vote against an increase for social assistance? How can he vote against new rental support for people in low income? How can he vote against these supports for disabled people? How can he vote against the Building Independence program? Will he stand up and explain how it is he can vote against the very budget that he called for?

Mr. Wall: — Once again for the Premier, Mr. Deputy Chair, here's how we can vote against the budget. We asked this government to index the basic allowance, to protect it against inflation. They failed to do it. And so we voted against the budget.

To the Premier, will he commit to index, will he commit to index for inflation, to protect against inflation the basic allowance in next year's budget?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the Leader of the Opposition is great at calling for things, but it's awful hard to get them to put any kind of detail behind it. But interestingly enough, the journalists here in Saskatchewan pressured that Leader of the Opposition when he was talking about getting an increase in the basic level of social assistance. And what did he call for in the press? He called for a \$5 increase. That's what he called for in the press.

Well the fact of the matter is we doubled that. It's a \$10 if I'm not mistaken. Now he was calling for 5, the increase is 10 and he votes against it. Now how can he vote against that? It's an amazing thing. You call for it; we double it and he votes against it. He votes against a program that over the last number of years

— the Building Independence program — has reduced the Social Services caseload in this province by 41 per cent. Mr. Chair, 41 per cent fewer people are receiving social assistance tonight in the province of Saskatchewan than when the Building Independence program began.

That's a very, very good news story. And I know what's good news for the people of Saskatchewan is often bad news for that opposition. That's a very good news story.

Now, Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition ought to stand up and explain to people receiving social assistance tonight why he and his party vote against this, why they vote against these increases for people on social assistance.

Or are they going back to the kind of stuff we were hearing before the last election? Or is that the real agenda? Because I'll tell you before the last election, that party, that Conservative Party opposite, you know what they were talking about in the election? They were talking about cutting \$50 million from the budget of Social Services. They were talking about work for welfare. That's what they were talking about, cutting the benefits to social assistance. They were talking about work for welfare. They were talking about boot camps and who knows what else.

Mr. Chair, has that policy changed? Can the Leader of the Opposition tonight assure the people of Saskatchewan that they are not a party that believes in work for welfare? Do they believe in that now or do they not? Do they still have this policy of wanting to reduce the department of social assistance budget by \$50 million? Is that still the policy or is it not?

And if it's not the policy, if his policy is as he says it is that we should do a basic increase — we do it — then why will he not vote for it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — I've got members on my side urging me to maybe move on because the Premier just simply doesn't get it. But I have faith, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm an optimist that soon, and maybe even in the next few minutes, he'll get this.

Here's what the opposition said and continues to say. The basic food allowance was not increased under his watch. He was a Social Services minister and he stood by and frankly was unable or unwilling to help people who need that basic allowance. It never increased on his watch. It didn't increase for two decades.

We in the opposition, the Saskatchewan Party, called on this government to increase the basic allowance and then we said clearly in the same media reference that the Premier points to, that even more important than the increase is indexing it for inflation so that it grows every year, so that it's protected against inflation.

And we weren't alone. We weren't alone. Because that Premier's former cabinet colleague, a former NDP minister, Bob Pringle — who now is doing yeoman's work for Saskatoon, working at the . . . running the Saskatoon feed bank and the learning centre — he weighed in on the issue, Mr.

Deputy Chair. Do you know what he said? He said the Saskatchewan Party was right. That's what he said. He said more important than, even than an increase, as much as we need that, is the indexing. That is why we voted against the budget.

And I'll tell the Premier something else. If next year he brings in a budget, his social democratic, responsible budget does not include indexing for the basic allowance for those on social services, those who need it most, if he brings in another budget like that, we'll vote against it again, Mr. Deputy Chair. We'll vote against it every single time.

The question to the Premier is this: are you going to increase it in the next budget or not? Are you going to index it for inflation?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, you know this is a Damascus road experience if I've ever seen one — this leader and this party now pretending to be the friend of the people on social assistance. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, when I was the minister of Social Services in this province — and I'm proud of that record — we established the Building Independence program. No, we didn't increase the food allowance but I'll tell you what we did do. We put in place the child benefit is what we did. We put in place the health benefit is what we did. We put in place new shelter allowances is what we did. And I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, the child benefit that began in Saskatchewan under this government's watch became a national program.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — A national program. The first, the first national social program in Canada since medicare. And they both started right here in Saskatchewan. That's what we've been doing. And as a result, 41 per cent reduction in Social Services caseload. And we didn't use the techniques of the Saskatchewan Conservatives either. We didn't use these notions of food vouchers that spin around over there. No we didn't do that. We didn't put all the people on work for welfare. No we didn't do that. We did it by recognizing the value of human life — the value and the dignity of people. We did it by building independence, not further dependence as their programs would do.

Now the Leader of the Opposition, he stands up tonight and what does he say? Oh he says, if we don't have indexing in next year's budget he'll vote against that budget too. Well let me ask him this. Let me ask him this for the record tonight. If there is an indexing clause for social assistance in next year's budget will he, the Leader of the Opposition, vote for that budget?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[20:30]

Mr. Wall: — You know, Mr. Deputy Chair, I note with interest the Premier's indignation that anybody in the province of Saskatchewan would question the NDP about one of the most woeful records in terms of social services in the country. He's indignant about it.

Well you know what, Mr. Deputy Chair, you know what, he should be as indignant on behalf of his constituents, Mr. Deputy

Chair — his constituents in Saskatoon Riversdale who have been now represented by two NDP Premiers, Mr. Romanow and now this current Premier. His constituents, Mr. Deputy Chairman of committees, Mr. Premier, your constituents struggle mightily because of the policies of your government.

And we know that again, another community-based organization called Care & Share, how many meals do they deliver to St. Mary School alone right in the heart of your riding — 5,500 meals per month for children because your government lets them down.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Because your government lets them down.

Do you know, Mr. Deputy Chairman, who's picking up the slack? It isn't the federal NDP. It's not the provincial NDP, and it's not the indignant and sanctimonious Premier, the MLA for Riversdale. It's the people of Saskatoon. It's community groups in Saskatoon. It's the business community. And do you know what they're asking? They're asking the same question that Bob Pringle is asking. They're asking the same question that the Saskatchewan Party is asking: will you index for inflation the basic food allowance in next year's budget?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, when all else fails over there, they engage in personal attack. We're used to that; there's no surprise in that.

Now, Mr. Chair, you see if this man and this opposition would vote for this budget, you know what they'd be voting for? A half million dollar increase in supplement for feeding programs. That's what they're voting against. They're voting against new funding for feeding programs, never mind in the constituency of Riversdale, but for the province of Saskatchewan.

Now I understand that the Leader of the Opposition once came to Riversdale and once came to St. Mary School, and he thinks he knows all about Riversdale. Well I tell you, he ought to come a little more often and hear what the people of Riversdale think of some of the policies of his party. I'll tell you, they've rejected it over and over and over again. They reject a party, they reject a party that before the last election went to the people of Saskatchewan and said, we're going to cut the budget of social services by \$50 million. That's what they said. That's what they said.

Now all of a sudden they think they can get in government by fooling folks. They got this new, this new concern. This new concern, I'll tell you it's johnny-come-lately on the concern when they have opposed and they have voted against every progressive public policy in this province for the last two decades and more.

Now let's understand in this budget what these people are voting against. They're voting against a \$10 increase to the basic allowance. Twice what he asked for, but they're voting against it.

But that's not all, Mr. Speaker, That's not all, Mr. Chair. In this

budget for families in Saskatchewan, the housing supplement will increase that \$131. And that supplement, Mr. Chair, for the very first time in the province's history — and we're very proud about this — that supplement is tied to acceptable levels of housing, acceptable quality of housing. Now for the first time we're not just going to send money to any kind of a slum landlord that wants to take it. No. It's going to be for acceptable quality housing. That's a brand new direction and we're proud of that direction.

He wants to talk about Saskatoon. He wants to talk about Riversdale. He just ought to tour around and see the work that's going on in the Quint Corporation in Riversdale in terms of providing quality new housing. He should have come around. He should have come around and looked at the work we're doing for seniors' housing in Riversdale in the Abbeyfield housing. He ought to visit the Meadowgreen facilities.

You know, Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, I want the Leader of the Opposition to again stand up, stand up and say what he will do next year. He was quick enough to say he'd vote against the budget. Will he ever stand up and say what he would vote for? Not likely. But we'll test him again: will the Leader of the Opposition stand up tonight and commit that if there is indexation of social services benefits in next year's budget, will he vote for that budget? Will he do it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Chair, my information is the only thing that his government has built in his constituency, represented by him now and by former Premier Romanow, is a liquor board store, Mr. Deputy Chairman. That's what his government has built in his constituency.

And he asks how many times we've been to Riversdale. We've been to the food bank. We've been to the food bank in the heart of his constituency a couple of times. And do you know what? And maybe this has changed, but up until very recently, do you know what the manager of the food bank had to tell me, in the heart of that member's riding in Riversdale? That he has not seen that member darken his door at the food bank.

And if that's not right, maybe there's an update. Maybe he has managed to get over to the food bank and find out about the good work that Bob Pringle and his team are doing to feed people and to provide them training. But if he hasn't, if he hasn't had the decency frankly to go to one of the most important and key centres in his riding, and would rather preside over a government that would build only a liquor board store in his constituency while people need help, people on social assistance need help, if that's his priority, then he ought to just say it.

Apparently the new liquor . . . the liquor board store in Riversdale that the NDP built has a nice big heart on it. Do you know what, Mr. Deputy Chairman? The people of Riversdale would like to see some heart inside for a change, maybe even from their member. And a good start would be to index for inflation the basic allowance. Will he commit to do it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — You know, Mr. Speaker, this, this, this . . . this tells you that the Leader of the Opposition . . . I'm going to personally invite him to come to Riversdale. He ought to come to Riversdale, and he ought to join the member from northwest who ran in Riversdale and then ran out of Riversdale to run somewhere else in the city of Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, a lot of commitment we have to Riversdale over there. He ran there and then he ran away. He ran away.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now let me, let me just tell you . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — All right, all right, Mr. Chair. While I'm inviting the Leader of the Opposition to come and tour Riversdale with me some day, I invite the leader from . . . or the member from northwest to come and run in Riversdale again, any time he wants.

Now let me talk about some of the work that's going on in the city of Saskatoon, much of it in Riversdale, some in other constituencies. It's work that's going on right across this province. In Riversdale, Mr. Chair, I was very proud to participate in the opening of the White Buffalo . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now in the constituency of Riversdale, just in the last, in the last several years since I've had the privilege to represent the people of Riversdale, I've participated in the opening of the White Buffalo Youth Lodge, right on 20th Street, a tremendous facility that's meeting the needs particularly of Aboriginal youth but not only Aboriginal youth, in the heart of Riversdale.

I've had the opportunity to participate with other members in our community in the establishment of the Little Chief Community police station in the heart of Riversdale, funded and paid for by the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Chair. I have had opportunity to work very closely with the community associations in Riversdale, including the Riversdale Community Association. Not just two or three weeks ago, we participated in a major community event, the annual Riversdale cleanup.

We worked very closely, very closely with the Riversdale bid in seeing the renewal of the economic strength of the community of Riversdale in Saskatoon as a significant partner and player in the economic resurrection and renaissance of the whole city of Saskatoon and the province of Saskatchewan. There are things happening in the economy of Riversdale that haven't been happening for years. We've invested in new school facilities in Riversdale, Mr. Chair, but it's not in just Riversdale alone.

We're participating right around the province in communities and neighbourhoods like Riversdale — whether it's in Prince

Albert, Moose Jaw, Swift Current; whether it's in Kindersley; whether it's in North Battleford, Prince Albert in the North, Meadow Lake, right across the province.

Now I want to go back to the question of food programs in Saskatoon. CHEP [Child Hunger and Education Program] is an important program in Saskatoon. It may not be recognized by the members opposite, but it is a very significant food program in the city of Saskatoon. CHEP provides children's nutrition programs in 35 locations. CHEP is providing more than 350,000 meals a year to children in Saskatoon. CHEP operates community kitchens where individuals and families come together to cook and to learn and to enjoy the fellowship of one another.

We have under CHEP's leadership in the city of Saskatoon the Good Food Box, a food distribution program. I've been and visited the packing of these boxes. It's phenomenal; the volunteers come and they pack these boxes of good healthy food and deliver them right around the city. They work with the Saskatoon Community Clinic. They work with Quint housing. I had the experience just two, three weeks ago of meeting with people, medical students who are now volunteering their time to provide services out of the community clinic branch right in the heart of Saskatoon.

Mr. Chair, it is not just in Saskatoon. I could repeat these stories from neighbourhoods here in Regina. I could repeat these stories from every community in the province. And we are proud. We are proud, Mr. Chair, to work with community-based organizations — to work with them, not supplant them, but to work with them — in delivering these positive programs for people in our communities right across the province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Mr. Deputy Chair, a member sitting in this Assembly, a member of this committee, the member for Saskatoon Greystone said in 1990 that:

We in the New Democratic Party are committed to ending the need for food banks in this province. We . . . will endeavour to do that in our first term of office.

March 30, 1990. We heard also that from the Premier. I assume that the current Premier who would have ran in the 1991 election agreed with his current colleague from Greystone. And let's just repeat then what the commitment of the NDP was that:

We . . . are committed to ending the need for food banks in this province . . . [And] will endeavour to do that in our first term of office.

Well here's the update, Mr. Chairman of Committees, here's the update. In March 2004 over 23,000 people visited food banks in the province. That is an increase of 37 per cent since March 2003. The use of food banks by children also increased by 24 per cent from the year before, Mr. Chairman. That's the record of this government. The province with the second fastest utilization rate, fastest growing utilization rate of food banks — do you know what province that is, Mr. Chairman? Well that's Saskatchewan. That is NDP [New Democratic Party] Saskatchewan.

What happened to the Premier's commitment to end the need for food banks? Why are we second in the country in the rate of growth in food bank usage in Canada?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I don't think I need to review for particularly that member of this House, particularly this new Leader of the Opposition, I don't need, I don't think tonight, to review . . . He wants to go back to 1990. I didn't think I had to remind him of what this province had to go through in the 1990s as a result of his time as a student of government in this building in the 1980s. You know it is interesting he wants to talk about 1990. Well there's a lot of folks in Saskatchewan would look back to 1990.

What we have done, Mr. Chair, in this province . . . I've talked about some of the accomplishments: how we have reduced the caseload on social services 41 per cent in just the last number of years; how we have improved the job opportunities in this province for people and for families. We're working with record numbers of job opportunities. I think now we're up to 13 straight months of job growth.

You know I've always maintained, Mr. Chair, the best social program is a job. And if people can find meaningful employment — not dependent on programs but find meaningful employment — that's the best of all social programs. Thirteen months of job growth. Now that's not recognized by members opposite. That won't be recognized. And you also assist not just through social assistance and not just through programs of government but you assist in the economy. Part of dealing with poverty in our province has to do with minimum wage.

Now we have chosen to regularly review minimum wage in this province. We are hoping to try through minimum wage to improve people's level and incomes and so on. But you know every time — every time — we approach the minimum wage, the Leader of the Opposition, the opposition over there, well they'll call it a job-killing monster. You watch. They'll call it a job-killing monster. They always fight any improvement, any improvement for low-income people. They fight it. They won't vote for a budget tonight, they won't vote for a budget that has significant benefits for low-income people and people living in poverty in our province. They won't vote for it.

Well then I ask the Leader of the Opposition, what's his position on the minimum wage? What is the position on the minimum wage of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party? Will they support an increase in the minimum wage to assist people living on very low incomes, many of the working poor in our province? Will they be there to support those people when the question of the minimum wage comes forward?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[20:45]

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I note with interest in the current budget estimates the amount of revenue that the government collects from gambling, significantly from VLTs [video lottery terminal], and it's significantly . . . It's more, obviously, than the province collected prior to the NDP being

elected in 1991 because there was no gambling in the province prior to that.

And maybe one of the reasons that there was no gambling prior to that was the vociferous opposition to any kind of gambling at all — and the member for Northcote will want to pay attention — by the then member for Moose Jaw, the current Premier of the province of Saskatchewan. I remember seeing articles from Moose Jaw where that Premier, that Premier led parades and protests and rallies against any kind of gambling, any kind of VLT expansion in the province of Saskatchewan. There are articles about the Premier's fight against any kind of gambling at all.

I believe after the '91 election that member, that Premier, went right into the cabinet and sat around a cabinet table that decided to do what then — to get into VLTs and to allow casino gambling in the province of Saskatchewan. And here we are now, \$230 million last year generated from that.

I wonder if the Premier could find it in his budget then to perhaps use some of those monies, the monies that he said the province should never collect in the 1980s . . . He said the province should never get into this, but now he's cashing the cheque, Mr. Deputy Chair. Now he's addicted to that revenue. Will he use that money then at least perhaps to increase, to protect against inflation the basic food allowance?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well the Leader of the Opposition seems determined we're going to have a discussion about the 1980s. I am surprised he wants to have that discussion.

Now he references — as he has in this House before and other members have in this House before — he references some document that he apparently has, indicating that I was leading parades in the city of Moose Jaw or something. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to table that documentation.

Would he please table the documentation that talks about myself leading parades in the city of Moose Jaw? Would he please table that documentation? Because you know what, Mr. Chair? I don't believe he can. I don't believe he can. And you see, that's the kind of opposition we've got. They'll just make things up. So if he's got the documentation, please to table it.

Now he knows — if he would care to study the budget documentation — that all of the revenues that will come to this government through gaming, whether it be through casino gaming, whether it be through VLTs, whether it be through bingo licensing, or all of the revenues that come to this government through gaming, where do they go, Mr. Chair? They go into the General Revenue Fund.

Now what do we do with the General Revenue Fund? Well we actually pay for education. We actually pay for health care. We actually pay for social assistance. We actually pay for programs for the disabled. Where does he think the money from the gaming revenues go to? They go exactly into social programs. That's exactly where they're going today.

Now if he has a policy that he would like to announce tonight, is it the same as his policy which he spoke about actually on January 20 of this year where the Leader of the Opposition said

that this government should consider pulling the gaming licences of on-reserve casinos? That's what he said publicly, that he recommended this government should consider pulling the gaming licences of non-reserve casinos if not in compliance with the smoking law. Now is that his policy?

You see he seems very averse to announcing anything that he stands for. He's good at talking about what he's against, but let's hear something about his own policy. Would he vote for a budget that contains an indexation of social services? We haven't heard that answer yet. We haven't heard the answer tonight of his . . . now his position on gaming revenues in this province. Is it the position of the Leader of the Opposition that we should reduce gaming revenues in the province? Is it his view tonight that we should pull the licences of off-reserve casinos that are not in compliance with The Tobacco Control Act?

Mr. Wall: — You know it would be nice if the Premier was even in the same area code as the question. I'll try to rephrase it. Here's the question. The Premier now relies on \$230 million in his budget from gambling. Was he or was he not opposed to VLTs, to gambling expansion in the province prior to election? And if he is not now opposed to it, fair enough. I mean, it's a matter of fact that we have it now in the province. But if he's not now opposed, what changed his mind?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, this government has taken what I believe is a responsible approach to gaming in this province. Mr. Chair, every dollar from gaming in this province goes to public benefit. Some will flow through our First Nations and Métis communities. Some flow through the General Revenue Fund. That, Mr. Chair, in my view is an appropriate and a responsible approach to gaming in this province.

But will the Leader of the Opposition declare . . . He wants to occupy the benches of government. He wants to do that, I think. Would he not therefore want the people of Saskatchewan to know what he and his party stand for on issues like this? So is he still of the view that he was on January 20 of this year? I'm not talking about those years when he worked in this building in the 1980s and so on. I'm talking about January 2005 where he was advising this government to consider pulling the gaming licences of on-reserve casinos. Is that still his advice to this government tonight?

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, some interesting quotes here from the Premier when he was an MLA. I want him to answer the question for the people of the province. You know the people of Saskatchewan need to be able to trust what their Premier says. They need to be able to believe him when he makes his pronouncements as he is prone to do from time to time. He goes around the province and makes certain commitments and makes certain proclamations about what he and the NDP believe. They need to be able to trust him. That, you would think, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, would be the very basic requirement of office. The very basic requirement of a premier would be that; would be that he would be able to say things and people would have reason to believe him.

So I ask him to just come clean. I mean, if he's changed his mind about gambling as he has about so many other issues, changed his mind for convenience and for politics, fair enough.

Why wouldn't he have the courage to admit it? Because in *Hansard* in September 21, 1987 here's what he had to say.

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Members, the . . . Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the question being put and sometimes the answer being answered so I would ask members to keep their comments a little quieter. I recognize the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The government's insatiable . . .

This is the Premier's words now:

The government's insatiable appetite for tax revenue, once tempted with a morsel of lottery profits, could encourage it to expand . . . legalized gambling in the province when it should probably be moving to constrict it.

It's one of a number of quotes. Fair enough. He did not believe in any kind of expansion of legalized gambling when he sat as a member of this House. Now his government is addicted to \$230 million in revenue — VLT and gambling revenue. He's expanding gambling. On his watch gambling has expanded, not constricted. And fair enough, maybe he's had a change of heart. Maybe the money has changed his mind. Maybe that's what it is.

And I want the Premier simply to answer the question for the people of the province. If he expects them to trust him, to take him at his word, would he explain why he said that in 1987 and now cashes the cheque from expanding gambling that happened under his watch?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I will provide for this House and for any platform or any citizen of the province, the policy of this government when it comes to gaming. And I think it is a very responsible policy. It is a policy that has said revenues from gaming should ought to go to good public purpose. It should not go to private profit; it should go to good public service. We have taken the policy that gaming in this province will be very strictly regulated. It will be very strictly regulated.

And we've taken a policy of co-operation with First Nations when it comes to providing gaming opportunities in this province, to have a participatory agreement with First Nations. And we have signed with our First Nations a 25-year gaming agreement that provides for opportunities in gaming and economic development for First Nations.

At the same time we have invested some of those gaming revenues into providing assistance for those who find themselves addicted. We have provided a number of educational and support programs for those who have an addiction to gaming. We have participated through those revenues in providing for health care and providing for education.

Now it's interesting because you know when we announced in partnership with First Nations there would be a new casino in the city of Swift Current, in the Leader of the Opposition's community, he welcomed that. He welcomed that, Mr. Chair.

And then he says to this government, but we ought to pull the licences of such facilities.

Now I'm sorry he is not afforded the luxury of being on both sides of this fence. He needs to declare for the people of Saskatchewan what is his policy, what is the policy of the Saskatchewan Party. You know the policies of this government. I've spoken to the policies of this government. You know the policies; you see them in operation. But what we don't know are the policies of the Saskatchewan Party.

And you would think that the member from Wood Mountain who speaks from his seat all the time, rarely stands up but speaks from his seat all the time, he is asking the question. Well let me put to his leader and to him the question.

The question is, what is the position of the Saskatchewan Party when it comes to First Nations gaming on-reserve? What is the position of the Saskatchewan Party when it comes to the casino in the member, the Leader of the Opposition's own hometown of Swift Current?

You know our policy. It's very public. It's very responsible, in my view. I think it's time that the Leader of the Opposition came a little clean and tried not to sit on both sides of the fence. Take a position. What is the position of the Leader of the Opposition and the Saskatchewan Conservative Party when it comes to gaming in this province?

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, for the poor but hardy souls that might be tuning in tonight to watch these proceedings, I know they are going to be disappointed — not surprised perhaps, but disappointed — in their Premier. Certainly our research tells us that they're very disappointed, because he says one thing and he does another.

And time after time tonight he's been asked a question. He's the government. They ran hard in the last campaign. They said and did anything they thought they needed to say and do to win, and he won. And he won. And now he's the Premier. And you know what, Mr. Chairman of Committees? It's now his job to answer questions of the official opposition and the taxpayers, the residents of the province of Saskatchewan.

It's up to him to tell the people of the province, to give them even an inkling of why in the world they should trust him. Because in his hands is health care for the province. In his hands is education for the province. In his hands is the stewardship of their money including in the Environment department and in the community resources . . . Community Services department. We've found out about how that worked out.

In his hand is their money in Crown investments, in Navigata, Mr. Chairman. In Pangaea \$3 million lost there. They've put that trust in the Premier. He is the government and he refuses to answer questions in this Assembly in estimates or question period. And that is why, Mr. Chairman, the people of the province have had enough of the member from Saskatoon Riversdale. They've had enough. They've had enough.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Here's what he said, here's what he said not long ago on the issue of gambling.

If the government . . . [is] so desperate for cash, [that it] thinks it can find a cash bonanza in that field by going directly into gambling and looking for revenues through gambling, Mr. Speaker, I say to you, they're mistaken.

That's what he said. Now he's cashing \$230 million cheque every year from gambling as the Premier. And he has the opportunity to stand up and just say, you know what, what I said in 1989 I didn't mean. I didn't mean it then. He should just stand up and say that. I've changed my mind and now I need this money.

But here's the question to him because we're going to move to agriculture. This \$230 million is significantly more. Obviously it's more than what we ever received in this province in the '80s and even in the early '90s because we didn't have gambling.

You remember the early 1990s under the government where they cancelled GRIP [gross revenue insurance program] because they said they didn't have money. Well now they do. They've got \$230 million year over year over year. They've got many, many more hundreds of millions of dollars from equalization and other sources.

And so the question on the agriculture file is this, and I know the member from Melville-Saltcoats will ask the questions. Will the Premier commit today to producers in the province of Saskatchewan to fund its share of CAIS? Will the Premier stand and admit that because his government signed the program, it ought to sign the cheque?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[21:00]

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well you know, Mr. Chair, it doesn't take long for the Leader of the Opposition to want to move on from a subject, particularly when he's confronted with having to describe a policy of his party and himself. He's enjoyed tonight referring to the 1980s. I avoid talking about that because he was so intimately involved in those years, but if we want to, if the members want to, we'll talk about their record in government from the 1980s.

We're fully capable of spending a couple of hours talking about their record in government, the 1980s. The Leader of the Opposition was seeking nominations for the Conservative Party at that time, working right here in the Grant Devine school of economics, learning everything he ever needed to know about government in the 1980s in this building. He wants to talk about the 1980s; I'm very happy to talk about the 1980s.

But you know what he won't do? He won't talk about his own position taken January of this year — his own position. He won't speak about his own position advising this government that we should pull the licences of on-reserve casino operations. He won't talk about that policy which was announced in January of this year.

Now why he is so afraid to talk about his own policies? I don't

quite get it, Mr. Chair, but he seems very afraid to talk about his own, his own policies.

Now we've had many discussions in this House over the course of this session about the circumstances facing the farming people of this province. I don't think there's a member in this House who doesn't recognize some of the challenges that have faced the farm families in Saskatchewan — never mind just this year but over the last number of years, whether it's been through the punishment by international subsidy, whether it's been through the punishment of drought, whether it's been through the punishment of closed borders on the BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy]. And from the, from the outset of these many challenges that have faced our farm families, we have stood with those farm families.

This Assembly well knows, this Assembly well knows that we funded CAIS 100 per cent our provincial share last year. This Assembly well knows that we have supported the livestock industry in our province, to support through BSE programs to the livestock producers of Saskatchewan. And this Assembly full well knows that this province, this government, this New Democratic Party government, I tell you, Mr. Chair, support farm families in Saskatchewan at a per capita level that is much higher than any other province in Canada.

There is no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker, and we intend to continue that kind of support to our agricultural communities.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Tonight I think we need to highlight some of the problems that we have in agriculture as well as all the other problems that the members have brought forward, and the Leader of the Opposition.

And, Mr. Chair, the question that the Leader of the Opposition just asked seemed to go right over the head of the Premier, as usually most problems do from rural Saskatchewan. In fact for the last 14 years under their leadership, rural Saskatchewan has not really been on any scale that they would weigh with any importance.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I just want to go and explain to the Premier a little bit in case he hasn't been out in rural Saskatchewan since he was Premier. I think he might have been out there once or twice. But there's hard times out there in rural Saskatchewan right now. Mr. Deputy Chair, there's suicides happening in the farm community, and there are things like that that we don't advertise in rural Saskatchewan. It's not the thing to do, but they're happening just the same out there, Mr. Deputy Chair.

There are family breakups going on in rural Saskatchewan right now. The stress levels are very high in rural Saskatchewan. And what does this Premier and this government do to help farm families in this province? Actually absolutely nothing. Because when there's a program like CAIS comes along when they could actually get behind farmers in this province, they see fit as they did last year to not fully fund the program until the eleventh hour, the very last minute, when they knew they were

in a corner and had nowhere to go. And after they had a windfall of \$1.2 billion, high oil and gas prices, equalization payment from the federal government, money that they didn't even expect to get, they found the few million dollars they needed to put into the CAIS program and finally funded it.

Here we go again this year when farmers are probably in the worst situation they've been for many, many years. We had a frost last year on August 20. We have poor quality grain. We have low commodity prices. We have the BSE. We have so many problems going wrong in rural Saskatchewan, and what does the Ag minister say and the Minister of Finance do? They cut the Agriculture budget almost in half at a time of need after they also, as I said, got a \$1.2 billion windfall.

Will the Premier answer the question that the Leader of the Opposition asked a minute ago? Will he commit tonight to fully fund the CAIS program?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, last year, 2004-05, this government provided in support to agriculture — get this — \$650 million, \$650 million and that's the largest amount expended in one year for over a decade, over a decade.

If we review the period since the fall of 2004 to this month, to May 9, 2005, the combination of federal and provincial programs of support has now reached \$1.3 billion — 1.3, every one of those dollars wisely expended, Mr. Chair, every one of those dollars wisely expended.

The fact of the matter is, this province, as I've said earlier, contributes on a per capita basis significantly more to its agricultural producers and its agricultural community than any other province in Canada. We've long made the argument we represent about 45 per cent — 44, 45 per cent — of all of the arable land in Canada, Mr. Chair, and we have 3 per cent or thereabouts of the population of Canada. And yet when it comes to programs in the national interest we are able to contribute, we're asked to contribute 40 per cent of those programs, Mr. Chair.

Now I've heard the members opposite support this position. I've heard them. They're not supporting it tonight, but I've heard them in past support it. Maybe they've changed. Maybe they've changed their position. We have advanced this argument now to the national government. We now have all of the Western provinces saying this is a fair argument that the split of funding on agricultural support programs is not good. This spring you will know, Mr. Chair, that when the federal government announced \$1 billion they said to all the provinces, we expect 40 per cent. Well none of the provinces of Canada felt able to do that — not just Saskatchewan. None of the provinces of Canada felt able to do that, including the province of Alberta who have a significant budget surplus, could not believe they could do that.

Mr. Chair, in this budget that we're voting on, on this budget that we're voting on, there is an initial payment for CAIS of 70 per cent, an initial payment of 70 per cent in this budget. Will the members opposite vote for this? Will they vote for a budget that has this amount of funding for the CAIS program? If not,

how do they explain not voting for that kind of support for agriculture?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, number one, I would like the Premier to table that document. I find that document totally amazing, and I've heard him use those words — this NDP government has put a record amount of money into agriculture. Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I would argue that point.

Last year the budget for agriculture in Saskatchewan was \$404 million, and this year the estimated forecast for 2005-2006 is \$264 million. That's not a record, Mr. Deputy Chair. That's almost cut in half from what it was last year.

Let's go on, Mr. Deputy Chair. We go back . . . Let's look at the NDP's record and the funding agriculture in the province of Saskatchewan, and I don't think they have ever put record amounts of dollars in. The year 1990-91 when they came to power, when this government came to power — and the Leader of the Opposition talked about them cutting the GRIP program — but the budget for agriculture at that point in time was \$449 million. It was higher than it was last year in the province of Saskatchewan when they're talking about the record amount of money that they've put in.

And now the Premier, bragging about all these dollars they put in, how they stand behind farmers, saw fit in the time of need. Probably the worst times we saw in the last 30 or 40 years in the agriculture industry because of BSE and the frost and other things, what do they see fit to do? They cut the ag budget in half . . . with a windfall, Mr. Deputy Chair. I mean, how many dollars would they have to take in in this province to be able to actually increase the agriculture budget in this province?

And I ask the Premier one more time because it's very important to farmers out there who are planting a crop right now: will he fully fund the CAIS program?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in this budget now under consideration there is an initial payment of CAIS of 70 per cent. Now the member opposite I think would want to be fair. And the fact of the matter is when he wants to look at the expenditures of this government in terms of agricultural support programs, he ought to look at the Public Accounts to see the actual dollars spent.

When we were challenged last year with new dollars for BSE we came through with those new dollars. When we were not successful, when we were not successful in coming to an agreement with the federal government for a fair federal share, we met our full allocation under CAIS.

Now the member opposite I think tonight is arguing we should have full funding for CAIS in this budget. We should accept that Saskatchewan should pay 40 per cent for agricultural programs without protest, which is an interesting observation because on March 30 — which is not that many days ago — on March 30, 2005, the same member who is now asking the

questions was recommending just the opposite. He said, quote, "I'd be . . . hesitant to jump in and say the province should step up to the plate." Now that's what he said on March 30, 2005. That's just several weeks ago. Now I think he's changed his position. If not, what did he mean on March 30? What does he mean tonight?

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Chair, the Premier talks about saying one thing, and here are the facts. But the facts are that we have always said we didn't agree with the 60/40 formula. But the fact also is that farmers in Saskatchewan are stuck with it. The government is stuck with it. We're stuck with it. We have no choice.

And until we can negotiate a better deal with the federal government, our farmers need help. It's that simple. So we're going to sit back and blackmail our farmers, hold them for ransom, and say, well because the federal government won't give us a better deal we're not helping you out.

Farmers are seeding a crop right now and have absolutely no idea how they're going to pay for their input costs. Seed costs have gone up dramatically, Mr. Premier. Canola seed is up to about \$300 a bushel. It's a price that we have never seen in history. Fuel prices, last spring 43 cents a litre are up to about 70 cents a litre. Fertilizer prices are up. Chemical prices are up.

Taxes are up. And the Premier might find that a little amazing after the fact that he said the status quo was not on. He was going to help agriculture producers with the education tax. Well he better come out to my half side of the province and see what's happened, Mr. Deputy Chair. They did a reassessment on that side of the province — well it's all over the province — and guess what happened? Agriculture land skyrocketed once again.

On our side of the province land has increased. The assessment has increased anywhere from 30 to 40 per cent. Do you know what's going to happen, Mr. Deputy Chair? Our taxes are going to increase once again. And that is mainly due to freezing the foundation grant by that budget that that Premier brought forward, the budget he said we wouldn't support, the same one that they froze funding for municipalities. And do you know what that's going to do? That's going to increase taxes for farmers in rural Saskatchewan.

So for the Premier to get up or the Ag minister to get up or the Deputy Premier to get up from time to time and say we stand behind farmers, he must mean they're a long way back, and they're peeking out from the cities because they're certainly not seeing the problems we have in rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Now, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'd like to . . . I've only got a couple more issues that I'd like to talk to you about tonight. But one of them is the issue that . . . it's commitments that members of the government have made to groups in the province. One being that the Deputy Premier — I remember here I believe it was last October — made to the Beef Initiative Group at a meeting in Saltcoats. And I remember a woman getting up to the mike and saying, directly to the Deputy Premier, will you help this group out, get started with a new

slaughtering facility in Saskatchewan? Will you fund a feasibility study and will you fund a business plan?

And the Deputy Premier got up and said we're behind our farmers, as the Premier has said tonight. We will certainly fund a feasibility study and a business plan. We're there when you need the help. We'll help you get these slaughtering plants going because we desperately need them.

Well the Deputy Premier was right in one aspect. We desperately need them. And very little has happened in the two years since the BSE has come upon us.

So I ask you, Premier, tonight, will he make a commitment that the Deputy Premier made to those producers last October that he'll fund a feasibility study and a business plan for these new ventures that are trying to start slaughter facilities in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that the Deputy Premier's commitment is a commitment met. We have funded a very significant feasibility study around expansion of slaughter and processing capacity in the province. It's a very, very important tool for those today in our province who are looking at options in slaughtering and processing. That feasibility study has been completed; it's now been available. I believe there's been meetings around the province where individuals and groups have sat down with the results of this feasibility study to find the benefit of its work. That work is done.

There is yet work to be done in meat processing and slaughtering in our province. You know, Mr. Chair, from my point of view, if we haven't learned from the closure of our border, lessons, there's something wrong about us. While we continue to work and lobby and push and use every means at our disposal to have that border to the American market reopened, that cannot be our only future-looking goal. We must have the goal of building further slaughtering capacity, further processing capacity in this province. We have to look at new international markets and, Mr. Chair, that work is well, well under way.

We have expanded slaughtering capacity in this province. We've expanded it in the nation. In fact I'm told we're the only nation that's ever had an incident of BSE where its borders were closed, that in fact increased its processing and slaughtering capacity, increased its consumer demand for its own meat.

We have work to do. I've discussed this at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention. We've been discussing it with players in the industry. We are looking at a variety of strategies and I'm hopeful that there will be announcements very soon around those strategies to build the meat processing and slaughtering capacity of this province.

At the same time, we note that tomorrow, I believe it's

tomorrow, the USDA, the United States Department of Agriculture, has its appeal of the Montana court ruling. I think that appeal is going to be heard tomorrow. We would hope for success in that appeal. We would hope to see that border open. We know there are many, many of our colleagues and friends in the United States of America who share our view that the border should be open.

I am encouraged by the response for instance of the Governor of Colorado when we were at the Western Governors' meeting this year. He has invited many of us to come to an event in Denver, Colorado which will support the Canadian beef industry, which will support opening of the border. So we continue to work to see the border reopen, but at the same time that's not enough. We need to build our capacity in the province, in the nation, and we look to new markets and other markets across the globe.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well I agree with part of what the Premier responded just now. He talked about if we don't learn from the BSE catastrophe that we've had happen to Saskatchewan and do something about it, it is our fault. I agree 100 per cent with him. The problem being that in the last two years in the province of Saskatchewan very little has happened, Mr. Chair. We have done absolutely nothing government-wise to help promote this industry

We have I believe it's Natural Valley going on their own and doing it and that's great — although I believe they asked for a PST exemption or rebate and were turned down by this government. Something this government could've done without costing them a nickel — not one penny — and they would've helped this venture get off to a great start. But in spite of that these people are going ahead.

But this government made commitments. The Deputy Premier, the Ag minister have made commitments to groups in Saskatchewan to turn what I believe is a tremendous disadvantage because of the BSE into what down the road could be one of the greatest advantages that we ever had happen to the province of Saskatchewan. But we need this government to take a leadership role and help some of these projects off the ground.

We're not saying, go out and buy these projects. We're not going out and saying, be a partner in these projects. But help them get off the ground. There are things this government could do. They could drop the corporate tax on a lot of these things. They could exempt the PST, rebate the PST. Do things like that, that really don't drain the provincial coffers but help groups like this get off the ground.

But they could also when they make a commitment to groups out there who are relying on their word — they believe what they say when they make a commitment — stand behind that commitment because we've gone almost a year from some of the commitments that they've made on that side and these people have not received 1 cent for feasibility studies, 1 cent for business plans — a commitment that was made by the Deputy Premier who sits in his chair and chirps that he never made those commitments. We'll I would say he did make those commitments and I hope some of those groups are watching

tonight who know very well those commitments were made.

The Deputy Premier is becoming, Mr. Chair, famous for going out and making commitments, saying whatever he thinks people want to hear in the province of Saskatchewan, and then when it comes crunch time he won't even answer the phone; he won't meet with these people. He completely ignores them but it was good fodder at the time and he thinks it was politically the thing he should do. Those kind of things are the reason that that government is going to be in opposition after the next election.

And you know what, Mr. Deputy Chair? We can't afford for that to happen too long into the future. Our farmers will be going under. Mr. Deputy Chair, they need help at a time in history when they need the government to go to bat for them. Federal and provincial government — the Premier's right — but especially when Saskatchewan farmers need help.

We need the CAIS program funded. We need commitments honoured that they make on that side of the House. And we certainly need more slaughtering plants in the province of Saskatchewan. What is the Premier going to do to help deal with the BSE situation and the shortage of slaughtering plants in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member of Melville-Saltcoats, in the opening of his last set of comments said, you've done nothing. You've done . . . Oh, now there's some agreement that we have done nothing. Oh now they're all agreed. Okay.

Well then let's talk about . . . Because you see, here is another very good example of they'll say anything with no reference to the facts. Here are the facts. They say nothing has been done by the Government of Saskatchewan since the BSE crisis began two years ago. They say nothing has been done. Well let's check the facts.

As committed by the Deputy Premier, in fact a feasibility study, a pre-feasibility study for increase of slaughtering capacity and processing in this province has been completed. And I now have the dates in front of me. Those study results were made available to project proponents through workshops that were held in Moose Jaw on March 7, 2005; in Yorkton on March 8, 2005; and in North Battleford on March 9, 2005. The work has been done.

Since the crisis arose two years ago, processing in this province, beef processing in this province has increased — get this, Mr. Chair — 40 per cent. Forty per cent. They say nothing has been done when in fact beef processing in the province has increased 40 per cent. Now he says nothing has been done.

There are now 30 different community groups working with the department, working in industry to look at opportunities for increasing slaughtering and processing in Saskatchewan. He says nothing has been done. There are 30 community groups working with the minister, working with the department in looking at opportunities of expansion. And he says nothing has been done.

Mr. Chair, this government, since this crisis began, has now expended — unplanned-for budgetarily — expended \$85

million in support of the beef industry in this province. Eighty-five million dollars and that opposition says nothing has been done. You see this is the attitude over there.

When we achieve an equalization deal from Ottawa worth \$367 million that opposition says it's table scraps. When we provide \$85 million to the beef producers in this province in a crisis period of time, this opposition says it's nothing, Mr. Chair.

Well then let's hear from this opposition how much, how much should we spend that we're not spending? Give us the dollar figure. What would it be that it's not a table scrap or nothing? What is the amount, please? Let's hear from this opposition some specifics. Let's hear more than complaint, more than rhetoric, more than hyperbole. Let's hear a constructive comment. How much? If 85 million, if 85 million is nothing, how much should be spent by the public purse in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, the Premier just didn't quite get it right. I didn't say nothing has happened. Every small facility in this province has expanded to the maximum that they can probably go and they've done a tremendous job. In spite of this government they've done a tremendous job expanding their facilities.

We have the Natural Valley slaughtering plant coming on stream right away. Great thing in Saskatchewan. And that's part, Mr. Premier, Mr. Chair, that's probably part of your 40 per cent and that's fantastic.

What I've said was, you've done nothing. You and your government as usual talk a lot, make promises, and have done absolutely nothing in the last two years to really promote the slaughter industry. And if you have done something, don't just talk dollars that you've spent. Show us the actual things that you've created out there to help deal with the slug of culled cows or bulls that we have in Saskatchewan today. Show us what's really gone on out there.

Because, Mr. Premier, if it wasn't for individual entrepreneurs out there that have done everything in their power to be able to handle the backlog of culled cows and increase our slaughter capacity in spite of your high taxation policies in this province, we wouldn't have increased at all. They've done a fantastic job.

But, Mr. Premier, when it comes to what you've done as a government in the province of Saskatchewan . . . and I guess we shouldn't be surprised because the track record of this government for the last 12, 14 years has been dismal to say the least. So I guess maybe we should have expected no more. But, Mr. Chair, as I said before, we should be turning a disadvantage into an advantage.

Mr. Premier, I want to talk for a minute about the set-aside program because I think the Deputy Premier and the Ag minister will back me on this one that we have a lot of problems in our feedlot industry right now today.

We have the set-aside program in Alberta that's probably putting in about twice that we are in Saskatchewan. And what's happening, even in the custom feeding industry that Alberta cattle that are in Saskatchewan being fed today are being put

back into Alberta, pulled off Saskatchewan farms, because the set-aside program in Alberta is much more lucrative than it is in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan I believe budgeted \$40 million for the set-aside program and the farmers in Saskatchewan got \$120 per head out of the federal government. And what they got out of this provincial government was \$30 a head now and it'll be 30 bucks later. That doesn't compare with what's happening in Alberta.

And we're getting calls every day, Mr. Chair, from feedlot operators, the feeders association, and all the groups out there that are tied to the feeder industry saying, we're losing our shirts; we're going to go under; we're going to go bankrupt; we need help. Mr. Premier, I'm sure that your minister has got these same calls. Will you do something to help make the set-aside program more comparable in Saskatchewan with Alberta and quit the outflow of our feeder cattle to Alberta?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Minister of Agriculture informs me that in fact people in Saskatchewan are putting cattle into the set-aside program here. We recognize that Alberta went off the national program and of course they do have a significant treasury and resources available to them to do that, Mr. Chair. We've maintained our role in the national program and the minister tells me that people are in fact enrolling in this set-aside program in the province.

But you know, the member from Melville-Saltcoats and the member . . . the Leader of the Opposition and that Conservative caucus, they can't get away with this. He stands up again and said we've done nothing. Did I not just explain that we provided from the treasury of this province, through this government, \$85 million — \$85 million — and he calls that nothing. You know, I don't know, Mr. Chair, what amount would cause that member to say it is something.

An Hon. Member: — Well more than . . .

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I see. Oh, more than 85 million. I hear a member over there saying it needs to be more than \$85 million. Well let me just explain, Mr. Chair, what \$85 million actually represents. In just this one, in just this one program to assist livestock . . .

The Chair: — Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm just going to say a word or two about what \$85 million means because apparently, apparently, apparently members over there don't understand what \$85 million actually represents. I tell you, Mr. Chair, in this province that represents, for this program alone, a new \$85 per person in Saskatchewan — a new \$85 per person. For a family of four that is well over \$300 that the people of Saskatchewan are providing to support our livestock producers. Now, Mr. Chair, I have said in this House and I've said it public — I've said it again tonight — every one of those dollars wisely, wisely committed.

[21:30]

Now I hear cheers and calls from the members opposite tonight that it should be a per cow funding. It should be based on per cow. The goal, Mr. Chair, the goal, Mr. Chair, is to bring some

stability and normalization to the industry. It is not to support each individual animal in the province. It is to provide stability and normalization as we go through this crisis period.

And as I've talked to livestock producers in this province — and I've talked to many of them in many communities — they have been extremely appreciative, very appreciative of the \$85 million that we've been able to provide. That's what they say to me. I do not hear the kind of complaint I get from the opposition. Those producers don't say to me, well that's nothing. They don't say it's nothing. They say that . . . Of course we all wish it could be more perhaps. But they understand that, and they say to us, we appreciate the support in this difficult time.

But it's not just indirect BSE support. We've seen the growth of the slaughtering capacity by 40 per cent in the province. We're working with 30 different community groups to look at growing that processing and slaughtering capacity. We've provided the feasibility study. Mr. Chair, we have stood beside our producers through this, through this very difficult time.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, you know producers across this province — cow-calf operations, ranches, farmers — they don't agree with you. They don't agree with you, Mr. Premier. They don't think you're standing beside them at all. Rural Saskatchewan feels betrayed by you and your government. Nothing has changed. And part of the reason is because of answers like that.

The member for Melville-Saltcoats raised the important issue of the set-aside program. And we understand the inequities, and we understand the different scope of the treasury of the Province of Alberta. But the reality is this. If you're listening or if the Deputy Premier is listening or returning calls to those in the feedlot industry, to those in the finishing industry, that whatever the reason, notwithstanding Alberta's larger treasury, our industry is at risk.

Manitoba is concerned. Their government sent out . . . I think their government sent out a press release if I'm not mistaken. Their government was willing to admit and say, we've got a challenge here because of what Alberta is doing with their program. So I mean we may not like the fact that Alberta is doing that, but we are that much closer, and I can assure you in southwest Saskatchewan we're even that much closer than obviously Manitoba or the rest of the province.

So what's your plan, Mr. Premier? What's your plan? We've heard for 10 years that member for Yorkton and others from across your benches say, we've got to do more finishing in the province of Saskatchewan. We've got to add value to beef. That's what they've said. Well that's the talk from that member from Yorkton. Now we hear from operators and from the industry concerned that the industry is at risk.

So well now . . . And now the Minister of Agriculture is chirping. Now the Minister of Agriculture — arguably, as

members of this side have noted, maybe the worst Agriculture minister in the history of the province of Saskatchewan — is chirping from his seat. And now he's briefing the Premier and that's alarming. I don't think anything is more scary for producers than to have that Ag minister briefing that Premier on matters regarding the farm, Mr. Chairman.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — And that is scarier than any Stephen King novel you'll ever find, Mr. Chairman. Whatever the reason, whatever the reason, whether it's the Alberta program, the set-aside program, the treasury, whatever the reason might be, we're hearing concerns that our industry is in danger. It's at risk. What's the Premier's plan? What's the Minister of Agriculture's plan with respect to the feedlot industry, the finishing industry in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it's interesting. I followed some of the estimates that have gone on around this budget and it's interesting that this issue was not raised with the Minister of Agriculture when the whole department and ministry was here to talk about it. Now that's interesting. That's interesting.

Of course, Mr. Chair, of course we recognize that the generosity of the Alberta treasury in terms of this program does present a threat. There is an attraction when Alberta's gone off the national program with significant new resources. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, the Saskatchewan feedlots and producers have been enrolling in this program in Saskatchewan and we have not seen a massive exodus. We understand the threat.

But to suggest, Mr. Chair, as this opposition has, the leader and others over there, that we have done nothing when we have contributed \$85 million for this . . . in this crisis period of time. When we have worked with producers and producer groups and community groups towards building processing, increased processing and slaughtering in our province. When we have seen a 40 per cent increase in slaughtering in this province. When we've worked through feasibility studies in this province. It is simply not correct, it is simply not correct to say that nothing has been done and that we're not working beside and behind our producers in this province, Mr. Chair.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, that answer is very special. It's very special but the problem is he didn't answer the question. Because those who will read *Hansard* from the feedlot industry, those in the industry who will be following this debate carefully, will note that the question was asked directly to the Premier of Saskatchewan. What's your plan? What's your plan in light of what is happening right now because of what Alberta is doing? And he didn't answer the question. He went on and on about . . . well it was basically rhetoric.

Maybe that half a million dollars he is spending in taxpayers' dollars for more spin doctors, maybe we saw that. Maybe we saw evidence of that just a moment ago because there was no answer to the question. What is his plan in light of this

challenge? What is the plan from the Minister of Agriculture? There they are conferring again, Mr. Speaker, and farmers across the province grow nervous by the minute.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to talk a little bit about some of the labour legislation that we have seen come into the province of Saskatchewan here thanks to the Premier and to this government. And if I may, I would like to take the Premier back to just prior to the election in 2003 where the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce wrote to him and wrote to the other political leaders and they asked a pretty fair question. Their letter to the Premier in advance of that election was, what labour legislation . . . And there was a number of questions but one of them was, what labour legislative changes do you have planned should you be successful, should you win the next election?

And here is what the Premier of the province wrote to them. And mind you that this is a letter from that Premier who asks people to trust him, to take him at his word; that he is truthful. He does it all the time. Fair enough. It is his right to ask people to trust him. He sends a letter back to the Saskatoon chamber and to answer the question, does he have any legislative changes planned in labour if he wins. And here is what he says in a letter that the Premier of the province signed. Took out a pen. Obviously proofread the answer or wrote the answer and then signed that this must be the truth according to the member for Riversdale. Here's what he says. No legislation changes would occur without extensive consultation with all the stakeholders.

That's what his letter said. So we have no legislative changes planned in labour without first consulting with the stakeholders. And who would the stakeholders be? Well in the case of most available hours, we know the stakeholders are almost any employer in the province in terms of the government's regulations with greater than 50, I think, employees: universities and colleges and municipalities and businesses, large, small, and medium businesses. They're all stakeholders. The FSIN, SIGA [Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority]. They were all stakeholders as well.

SaskTel wasn't a stakeholder on that particular issue though because they're exempted actually. And I know members might be surprised to find out that a Crown corporation wouldn't have had to abide by that law but that was true.

The Premier promised in a letter that he would consult first before any major changes. And here's what we know, and if these facts aren't right, they're offered up. If this story, if these elements of what I am about to say aren't right, we invite the Premier to clarify it because he has the Minister of Labour there to help him. The Premier promises, the Premier promises to consult before any major changes. He wins the election. The NDP win the election and they set out to do exactly what they said they wouldn't do, undertake a major legislative change to proclaim section 13.4 — a major, significant change in labour legislation in the province, one that would be unique on the continent, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier, on the continent.

So he's going to make that change. He's going to proclaim 13.4 which was lying dormant on the books for 10 years. He's made that decision notwithstanding his promise to the Saskatoon

Chamber of Commerce.

So does he do the extensive consultations, Mr. Chairman? Did he consult with the business community? Well you know what, Mr. Chairman, you know what we found out — and maybe the Premier wants to correct us — is his Minister of Labour who remarkably is still the Minister of Labour met with the chamber of commerce or some business groups only days before she went to the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] and publicly announced that the government would proclaim 13.4.

Now, Mr. Chairman, did she, did she let the business community know at that meeting days before she went to the SFL convention that she was going to make this major labour legislative change? Did she take that opportunity to consult with them about that? The answer is no, she didn't.

So here's the spectre . . . oh well that's interesting. And if we're wrong, fair enough. I'm interested to hear from the Premier because I think there will be others in the province that don't agree, that don't agree that there was consultation ahead of implementation.

So I guess the question to the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well, well the minister says it was never implemented. The minister announces that the government will proclaim 13.4 and there was no prior consultation, no prior consultation. So if the opposition wasn't sufficient would she have proclaimed 13.4? Absolutely. And was there any prior consultation? No there was not. The Premier broke another promise and I'd like an explanation as to why he did that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well I sincerely hope, Mr. Chair, that the Leader of the Opposition is as good as his word in the House a few moments ago because he said if he's wrong he'll admit it. Well he is wrong, Mr. Chair. He is wrong.

He's wrong, number one, on this point. When the Minister of Labour spoke to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour convention — if he'd been there he'd have heard the speech — she made it very clear that what was being undertaken was a drafting of regulations to see if these regulations could work in the modern workplace. It was a consideration that she was undertaking.

The Minister of Labour . . . Will the Leader of the Opposition admit he was wrong that the Leader of the Opposition . . . Will the Leader of the Opposition stand in his place and admit that he was wrong? She did not go to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and announce that these would be proclaimed. She said we would begin a process. And that process, Mr. Chair, was a process of intense, intense consultation — a level of intensive consultations that I have seen rarely in this province.

I won't go through all of the meetings, all of the meetings that this Minister of Labour had right across the province of Saskatchewan, dozens and dozens of presentations, in-person, face-to-face presentations, presentations provided in written form. At the end of that consultation period we made the decision that was enacted in legislation today. It is wrong to say that the Minister of Labour stood at the Saskatchewan

Federation of Labour and announced that these regulations would be proclaimed. She announced that we would undertake the process, a process which we undertook, a process of very, very significant consultation.

Will he admit there was a process of very significant consultation? Will he admit he's wrong or will he keep up the rhetoric? The rhetoric that appears every time, every time this government seeks to do something of benefit to the working men and women of Saskatchewan. Every time we get the kind of rhetoric, we get the kind of acting that comes from the Saskatchewan Party. So will he now stand up and admit that he was wrong?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, I noted something interesting in the Premier's answer. He said every time the government does something of benefit for working people. So I assume he's talking about 13.4 because that's what the questions are about. And if that's what he's saying he ought to clarify it. Because you know what the working people of this province represented by municipal employers, represented by student unions, represented by First Nations and those with disabilities, said? Most available hours, government-directed hours, were not good for working people in the province of Saskatchewan.

But if it's his position, fair enough. That is why the stakeholders — municipalities, First Nations, businesses — don't trust him. They know he is waiting for another opportunity to introduce this. That's what he's waiting to do. He just stood up and said that this 13.4 was in the interests of defending working people and we know that's not the case.

Now this argument from the Premier that what the Minister of Labour did at the SFL did not amount to announcing that they were going ahead with 13.4 is ridiculous. It's absolutely absurd. In fact questions were asked in this House of that minister this fall, shortly after she made the speech in November this past fall, and she defended it. This is something the government was going to do. It was going to move ahead with it; 13.4 was the right thing for Saskatchewan. That's what your government was saying. There was no consultation.

Did she or did she not meet days ahead of her convention speech at the SFL with the business group, and did she or did she not remain silent on 13.4? She absolutely remained silent on it when she had a chance to do the consulting that you promised, sir.

[21:45]

And I would be much more upset with a minister that has undermined the word that you gave to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce. Because you gave them a clear commitment, sir. You gave them a clear commitment to consult before you would introduce it and you broke that commitment, and I want an explanation as to why.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, you, sir, Leader of the Opposition, stood in this House moments ago and said, if I'm

wrong I'll admit it. Admit it. Admit it.

The Minister of Labour . . . well now you see, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the Leader of the Opposition which convention of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour he's attended lately. Which one? Was he at the convention that the minister made her speech at? If he was, he might have some credibility here. I don't believe he has ever attended a convention of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. I don't think he's ever attended.

Now when he says that he'll admit he's wrong, he ought to be as true as his word not given in this House five minutes ago or ten. The fact of the matter is the Minister of Labour announced that we were doing a consideration of the most available hours provision of legislation that had been passed in this House a decade ago. A decade ago. Not new legislation. Past legislation, never proclaimed.

She indicated to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour — an appropriate venue in which to indicate it — we would undertake a process that would lead up and to this spring session when decisions would be made. There was a consultation unlike few other consultations I've seen happen in this province. This Minister of Labour travelled the province extensively, met with group after group in community after community, received thousands of comments, received written submissions both in favour and opposed to the proclamation of most available hours.

At the end of the day she made a decision, recommended it to the government. The government's taken the decision not to proclaim that section of the Act and in fact as we've done with legislation today, to remove it, but not for a moment to give up on the concern that provoked this discussion in the first place and that's the role of the part-time worker in our communities and in our society.

I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, we have work to do. We have work to do. We do not, we do not want a circumstance in Saskatchewan where a single mother for instance has to work two and three and four part-time jobs. We want to give the people the security of more full-time opportunity. That may come through better education; it may come through legislation; it may come through a variety of approaches.

So what have we done? We've established a task force of extremely credible Saskatchewan individuals who are looking at these issues, not just in a Saskatchewan context. They're using national research. They're looking at these issues. They will report back to us and we intend to make the policy decisions to ensure that working people in our province, particularly part-time workers, will find the balance that is right for each of them.

There will be those part-time workers who need part-time work, who want part-time work. There will be students who'll be involved in part-time work. But there are part-time workers tonight in Saskatchewan who seek to maximize their employment and we're going to find mechanisms with them and with the business community and with working people to make that so, Mr. Chair.

Now to go back, that member of the House just stood in here and said he would admit if he was wrong. If he can tell me he was at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, if he can say he was at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Now he's telling me to sit down. He doesn't appreciate being challenged. Well if he was at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and heard the minister's speech, then please stand up and say so.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, here's a copy of the minister's speech from the SFL convention. The then Labour critic for the Saskatchewan Party was at the convention and he brought back the text of the minister's speech and I'm going to read it for the Premier. And then when I'm done reading this for the Premier in reference to what he promised the chamber of commerce, I want him to stand in his place and apologize to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Here's what the minister said. She's talking about, she's talking about in a whole section of the speech, she's talking about 13.4 when we referenced this. And we can table the speech. It's the text of her speech. You'll have it. She should have provided it to you before you got up and gave that answer, frankly. Here's what she had to say:

It's been 10 years since the existing regulations were developed and it's not at all clear that they do what they were intended to.

And while you have been patient, you have been increasingly energetic in your calls for a resolution. You have said, "Just find a way".

That is what the minister said at the convention.

I couldn't agree more — that's why I have directed the Department of Labour to bring back regulations that will make . . . 13.4 work.

That's what she told the SFL. That's what was publicly reported to the province of Saskatchewan. She was going to bring back 13.4, the regulations that would work. Well the member for Northcote, and I understand why he might not get this because he is after the . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. I recognize the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — She goes on in her speech to say:

I couldn't agree more — that's why I have directed the Department of Labour to bring back regulations that will make section 13.4 work — regulations that will provide part-time workers in Saskatchewan the opportunity to increase the number of hours they work if they want to.

Mr. Chairman, if that's not a commitment to bring about government-directed hours, very publicly, I don't know what is. What we do know though is this: that the minister then defended her comments, that this would be the actions of that Premier's government in question period, in the legislature.

When she was asked by the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood, she defended it. Clearly this was the action of the government. This is incredible now that the Premier's saying, well no we never were really going to do anything with 13.4.

We went through, we went through the absolute misery of a government bungling of this issue for the fun of it — that's what the Premier would have us believe I guess. I want that Premier on behalf of the Saskatoon chamber to apologize to them for not consulting, for breaking his promise that he made, that he signed in a letter when he was looking for their vote but quickly forgot about after he won the election.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair. Well they shout from their seats. They're very good at shouting from their seats, but they're not very good in engaging in developing public policy, I'll tell you that, Mr. Chair.

Now here again is exactly, exactly what I reported to the House tonight. I reported to the House tonight that the Minister of Labour went to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and announced that she was asking her department to draft new regulations to see if they could be made to work for the modern workplace. That's what she did; that's what we heard in the speech. Then she took those new regulations, the new draft and went into a public consultation period.

Now, Mr. Chair, when a minister of the Crown travels extensively in the province, has advertised public meetings, and in fact I don't know, the Minister of Labour, how many of those meetings she conducted, but I know she conducted them around the province.

Members from communities approached every . . . Well the members of the opposition I guess didn't choose to participate in that process, but I tell you, many, many Saskatchewan people and groups did. There were those who came to the consultation opposed. There are those who came very strongly in favour.

On balance, it was the conclusion of the minister, recommended to government and accepted by government, that the package of regulations could not be made to appropriately work in the workplace today.

That's how public policy should work, Mr. Chair, and that's exactly what I committed to the Saskatchewan . . . Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, that kind of consultation process, the kind of consultation process that was undertaken that ultimately resulted in the vote that we took in the House today, Mr. Chair.

But I want to repeat there is no diminishing of this government's desire or commitment to finding mechanisms to improve the lot of the working person in Saskatchewan, to find mechanisms and opportunities so that those who want to more maximize their hours towards full-time work or at full-time work should have that opportunity. To recognize that there will be those in our communities who want part-time, and need, and part-time work is entirely appropriate for them. We recognize that.

But I will not nor will this government lose sight of the fact that there are individuals in our communities tonight who are seeking more full-time employment. And we want to work with them, with the business community, with the trade union movement, and with Saskatchewan people generally.

And in the course of this long consultation, Mr. Chair, I had opportunity to meet with groups and individuals about this subject and I found general agreement among all that there are issues that need to be dealt with for part-time workers in this province. That was universally admitted and observed. We are going to find those mechanisms. We have put in place a very prestigious group of men and women who are working towards this goal. We expect their work later this year.

On the fundamental point, no commitment was made at the SFL. The minister made the commitment that we heard tonight, that I repeated tonight, and an extensive period of consultation was undertaken.

Now let me again go to the Leader of the Opposition. Why is it, I ask him, that whether it's a discussion and a consultation about benefits to part-time workers or whether it's a discussion and a debate about The Trade Union Act, whether it's a debate about labour standards, occupational health and safety, or the minimum wage — every time there is an initiative that wants to benefit working people in our province, he and his opposition caucus over there, I tell you they oppose it.

He opposed it when he was in government on this side of the House and they continue to oppose any benefit, any progress for working people. Why is that?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, that answer was just ridiculous. It's sad. The answer that he just gave is pathetic and sad, because he is saying, he is saying this. He is saying the public consultations that he promised, happened. They happened after the minister goes to the SFL and announces that she is doing government-directed hours, and here's what the consultations are. The consultations are the entire province rising up in opposition to this hare-brained scheme and forcing the government to meet with the people of Saskatchewan. That's not extensive consultation. What he promised, what he promised before the election was extensive consultation.

It's pretty clear, Mr. Premier, it's pretty clear. And the fact that you won't apologize, the fact that you won't apologize is maybe saddest of all. It's saddest of all because you made a commitment. It's in writing. It's in writing and you have broke your promise.

Now we know that eight days before the SFL convention that Minister of Labour was asked point-blank by the, I believe by the provincial chamber if . . . Oh, well, she's I think mouthing some unparliamentary language to me. But it's my understanding — if it's not true then let us know — we understand that she was asked about any major changes in her department upcoming eight days before she went to the SFL and she said nothing. She said nothing to them.

Does the minister think, does the Premier not think that the

invoking 13.4 is not a major change? And if he doesn't think it's a major change, Mr. Chairman, I mean I don't know what is. I don't know what is.

Will the Premier confirm, will the Premier confirm then that his Minister of Labour, days before she spoke at the SFL, was asked by a business group if she had major labour legislative changes planned? And if he confirms that she said nothing in response, will she do the . . . will he do the right thing and fire that Minister of Labour?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — When all else fails in opposition, call for a resignation or call for a firing. When you can't make your argument based on fact or logic, this is what I suppose every opposition in the world does but this opposition is particularly good at it. When you're failing in your fact and when you're failing in your logic, when you're losing the argument, you call for resignations. Now if the Leader of the Opposition wants . . .

The Chair: — Order, order.

An Hon. Member: — Let him answer the question, please.

The Chair: — I agree. Let the member answer the question. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to be true to his word then he ought to stand up and admit he was wrong. I mean here's the *Hansard*. Here's what the Minister of Labour said in this House. She said:

. . . one of the reasons of looking at this piece of legislation — seeing if it fits today, [seeing] if there is a way to make it work . . .

[22:00]

This piece of legislation has been on the books in Saskatchewan for 10 years. A past piece of legislation, Mr. Chair. A responsible Minister of Labour, having seen a Bill on the books for 10 years, takes a decision to see if that's going to work in the workplace today. She announces that, what she is going to do. She announces at the SFL, an entirely appropriate venue to make such an announcement. But then she begins a process of extensive consultation.

Now the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to recognize that sitting down with Saskatchewan people in advertised public meetings right across this province, with groups and individuals to do the consultation . . . He wants to describe . . . he doesn't see that as consultation. There's nothing I can do I guess to change his mind about that.

But I think reasonable people in Saskatchewan understand that when a minister of the Crown, Minister of Labour or any other ministry, goes to public meetings and communities all across the province, invites written submissions, invites people to these discussions, has the consultation and, at the end of the consultation, balances all of the views and makes a decision, that is, in my view, very appropriate consultation. And you know that in fact is more consultation than, if I may say, is done

on most pieces of legislation to come before this House, or regulation.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the Premier has indicated that the meetings around the province constitute a consultation on the 13.4. Can you highlight then for the Assembly what similar meetings occurred with respect to Bill 87?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — In terms of the other Bills that we've debated in this session, the Minister of Labour has received written presentations, on this list I have, from the chamber of commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. I know there's been a significant number of letters received. And again, the opinion has been divided, not all supportive and those very supportive. Again we have listened to the people of Saskatchewan.

In government you listen. You have to at some point decide. And we've made some very clear decisions — of course opposed by the Saskatchewan Conservative Party — very clear decisions to clarify the roles and the relationships and the rights of the Labour Relations Board; very clear, very clear decisions around The Trade Union Act. They've been introduced into this House and debated in this House.

Mr. Chair, that is precisely how government should work. There are conversations with the public. There are principled positions taken by government. We make decisions. We debate them in the House and at the end of the day they are passed or they fail. And at the end of the day the people of the province will judge us on the decisions that we have made.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, at the end of the day they're going to judge this government on whether they trust it and right now they do not, Mr. Chairman. They do not trust this government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — The Premier already defined consultations. He said there was meetings around the province with respect to 13.4. Will he please highlight for the Assembly those extensive consultations that he promised to the Saskatoon chamber regarding Bill 87 and Bill 88?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, again I repeat, in terms of Bill 86 and 87 a variety of input was provided to this government through the chamber of commerce, through the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, through the Saskatchewan federation, through individuals and across our province, Mr. Chair. We take those views and we assess. We make our decision.

We've made decisions around the . . . I know the Leader of the Opposition and the Saskatchewan Conservative Party don't like the decisions. I understand that. They don't like any decision it seems that wants to benefit working people in our province. They fight every one of them. Because we'll see — there's going to be another example when we work through the process

of the minimum wage. I wonder what they're going to say about minimum wage for workers.

We know what they say about The Trade Union Act. We know what they say about labour standards. Now can we, can we have the opposition perhaps do a little consultation? Perhaps they would consult with some working people and see how working people feel about some of the positions they take when it comes to progressive labour legislation in this province. We consult. We decide. We choose. We put forward legislation. It's debated. And at the end of the day, Mr. Chair, we will be judged on the decisions we have made on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, would the Premier please highlight for this Assembly these letters that he references, these consultations that occurred. Would he please highlight which of those occurred prior to the introduction of the Bill.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I do not have in the Assembly tonight the correspondence that has provided for every minister or for every ministry in this government. Mr. Chair, I undertake that I will work with the ministry of Labour. We will provide those written comments to the Leader of the Opposition or anybody over there. We don't have them here in the House tonight.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, the reason that the Premier doesn't know . . . I think he conveniently doesn't know how many of these letters — this evidence of his extensive consultation — he received prior to introducing the Bill because the answer is none. The answer is they didn't take this Bill out for consultation like he promised the Saskatoon chamber. They did not go out and have public meetings. They didn't phone up the SFL. Or maybe they did, I'm not sure. To our knowledge, they didn't. We know they didn't phone up other stakeholders, employers in the province. They did not do prior consultation. And so the Premier broke his word.

Now if the Premier approved of the minister's actions in this regard in the introduction of Bill 87, prior to consultation and therefore breaking his promise from the election, if he approved of her plan then he should stand and apologize. If he didn't approve of her plan to undermine his word to the chamber, then she should be fired. Which one is it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I approve 100, 100 per cent of the legislative package that has been brought before this Chamber in this session. I have stood in this my place and voted for those provisions. There is no doubt in my mind that I support this Minister of Labour and the legislation that this government has brought before this House.

I know that the Leader of the Opposition and the Saskatchewan Party do not support this kind of legislation. They do not support progressive legislation that tries to improve the lot of working people. They won't even support legislation that is trying to clarify in light of court cases. They won't even do that. Will they support this kind of legislation? No. What they do, they take anything that wants to benefit working people and heighten up the rhetoric. They call it a job-killing monster. You

can't have a reasonable conversation with folks who use this kind of rhetoric. But they think that's good for their political advantage. Mr. Chair, I tell you it's not good for their political advantage.

What is good for political advantage is good public policy. We work with communities, we work with the business community, with working people. We've involved ourselves in consultation. At the end of the day we make decisions. We bring them to this legislation. I support them. We support them and they have not.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, not too many years ago that member was running for the leadership of the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan and obviously he was successful. Excuse me. And in that campaign for leadership he made a number of promises about consulting with people, similar to the promises he made to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce.

There is a website from CBC Saskatchewan on the candidates for the NDP leadership. And wouldn't you know it? Here is the one that is highlighting the member for Riversdale, the current Premier, on a summary of the commitments he was making should he be leader of the NDP and therefore premier of the province of Saskatchewan.

And he talks a little bit about a centre for excellence in health care at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], strangely enough. He also promised to improve ambulance and emergency services in rural Saskatchewan. And that's interesting because that's going the other way.

But then here's what he says about introducing Bills and giving people a chance. And the CBC's paraphrasing him but it says he would also allow the public to speak for and against proposed Bills in the legislature. That's what the Premier of the province said when he was out campaigning.

Now, now I know, Mr. Chairman, that people are going to be tuning and listening to this saying, yes but he was campaigning for something so did he really mean it. And it's a fair question because there's a track record here. But we're going to give him a chance. We'll give him a chance to answer the question. He said that he would allow the public to speak for and against a proposed Bill in the legislature.

Now at the committee stage of this particular Bill, Bill 87 I think we're talking about, the member for Canora-Pelly, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and official opposition members on the committee suggested — quite reasonably I thought, given the concerns from stakeholders in the economy about Bill 87 — that it be taken out for . . . well to allow the public to speak for and against proposed Bills in the legislature.

I'm not . . . well I'm pretty sure actually that the motion by this deputy leader was denied, that the NDP, probably with the approval of or the direction of the Premier who made this promise, directed their majority members on the committee to prevent any public consultation.

So how does the Premier square that circle? This isn't from a decade ago. This is from when he ran for the leadership. He

said people ought to be able to speak before and against Bills that are before the legislature. And his government, his members quashed an opposition motion to do exactly that with Bill 87.

Will he explain that to the people of the province of Saskatchewan? And if he's had a change of heart, will he apologize to the people for making this promise in the first place?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition seems to have a very selective memory or perhaps he doesn't remember. These Bills were introduced in this legislature last fall — last fall, months and months ago. They were not, by this government, forced through in the fall sitting. No, they were introduced just for this purpose: that people in the interim would have opportunity to comment on these pieces of legislation. In fact letters were provided inviting people to consult, inviting people to comment.

This is precisely what I had hoped in speaking for the change that I thought should happen to this legislature. I'm very supportive of the changes that we've made in the process of this legislature as we move toward a fall sitting where in fact like last year legislation can be introduced. It need not therefore be passed but then has opportunity for the public to comment. That is precisely what happened with these two pieces of legislation. It has been I think a very healthy process.

What the opposition doesn't like of course is that we're accomplishing something good for working people. They don't like that. They don't like having a decision that's going to benefit working people and business people in the province of Saskatchewan — decisions that are going to enhance the economy of Saskatchewan. They don't like that, Mr. Chair, and so they don't . . . they argue there's something wrong with the process.

I think the process of introducing these pieces of legislation in the fall, giving the opportunity between a fall sitting and a spring sitting for the public to comment, for people to have opportunity to express their opinion, in fact an opportunity for government to invite that kind of a discussion which the Minister of Labour did, I think it's just the right process. We're at the end of the process.

The Leader of the Opposition and the opposition generally do not like this legislation. I think that's a mistake on their part, but fair enough. That's their view. That's the point of a democratic debate in this House. There will be those who propose and those who oppose. They oppose, we propose. We're getting things done for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, what this Premier is not telling anybody watching or members of the committee that may not know — maybe members of his own party; I would assume that might be the case — is that one of the most important sections of this Bill, section 18, was almost completely rewritten after it was introduced, after it was through on to the committee stage.

And the minister gave an hour's notice of that and said, here are the major substantive changes to the Bill, not even introduced in this Assembly. It's an affront to democracy. It's an affront to this institution.

And the Premier has the gall then to say, Mr. Chairman, the Premier has the gall to say that the extensive consultation he promised the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, that his extensive consultation is, introduce the Bill without talking to anybody about it first, introduce the Bill and wait and see if your phone rings. Is that what you think, Mr. Premier? Is that what you think? Because if it isn't, if you did some prior consultation on 87, we're asking, I'm asking you to table a letter. Let us know. Give us some evidence. Because there is none to date. The evidence is you introduced a Bill in this Assembly and you waited for the phone to ring. And that's the major process you highlighted.

But you know what? When you were campaigning for the leadership of this party, when you were campaigning for the leadership of your party to be the premier of Saskatchewan, you know what you said? You said he would . . . He said he would also allow the public to speak for and against proposed Bills in the legislature.

Mr. Premier, what changed from now to then? Why has your opinion changed? Why do you no longer believe that the people of the province should be allowed to consult? Why do you believe that consultation is basically introducing the Bill and waiting for the phone to ring? And if you believe all of those things, why in the world are you surprised that nobody in Saskatchewan believes what you have to say?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, I believe the public must have a very difficult time following the logic here. When I entered into the campaign for leadership of the New Democratic Party — a campaign I am very proud and privileged to have come out victorious — I campaigned you know against . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[22:15]

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — . . . against several other very, very competent candidates for the leadership of the party, unlike the unelected Leader of the Opposition there in a party that couldn't come up with more than one candidate. Nobody else wanted to lead the party, interestingly enough.

We were challenged and we put forward some points of view. One of the points of view I put forward in seeking the leadership of the New Democratic Party was a point of view that said I think there's more appropriate ways that we can do business in the legislature. And I've been very pleased to see the work of the all-party committee in this legislature as we have made changes to do exactly what I had hoped we could do — that is to provide a committee structure that could in fact hold its own public hearings, travel the province if necessary. We've seen a number of examples where we've had legislative committees established here that have travelled the province. The tobacco control committee did some very, very good work

in that regard.

I have supported, I have very clearly supported the notion that we ought to have an opportunity to introduce legislation in the fall and then move to a spring session where you would look at the debate and the passage. That is precisely what happened with these two Bills around labour issues. They were introduced last fall; invitations were issued encouraging people to make presentations. But you know what, Mr. Chair? There was consultation. There was presentation. There were opinions voiced in that interim period. And what do you expect we do with that opinion? Well where it's appropriate in our view, we make changes.

Now the Leader of the Opposition stood in his place a moment ago and said, but the Bill changed. Well of course it changed, Mr. Chair, because we had some consultation. We heard from the legal community, the changes that the Leader of the Opposition are talking about. The original Bill talked about the Canada Labour Code. The legal community in Saskatchewan said it would be much better to define with more precision in the legislation instead of using the general rubric of the Canada Labour Code. That is precisely what we did. We listened to that legal opinion. It came from people in Saskatchewan. It was reflected in the legislation. It makes it in our view a stronger piece of legislation.

But the point is, Mr. Chair, that's how I envisioned, I had hoped we might evolve process in this House. And it's happening and I'm very supportive of it. And why the Leader of the Opposition now can't understand the difference between the way it was and the way it is, surprises me. These Bills were introduced in the fall. We had opportunity for that public conversation that was undertaken. We learned from it. We benefited from it. The legislation's been changed.

Again I tell you, Mr. Chair, what's going on here. This is not a concern about the process. This is the concern of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party who did not want these Bills to pass, who do not want any benefits to accrue to the working people of Saskatchewan, who do not want to see this economy move ahead. You see it's very interesting to me, Mr. Chair, that we have been now at these estimates — what is it? — two and a half, three hours more and I have not heard from the opposition one question about the economy of the province of Saskatchewan. Not one question.

Now we'll spend a long time about most available hours legislation that has been debated. We've taken our decision. In fact we have done, in terms of the most available hours, we've taken a decision that the opposition voted with us for today. They were with us on this and now we spend another hour or so debating it here tonight.

You see, Mr. Chair, what's going on. They don't want to talk about the good news in the province of Saskatchewan. They don't want to talk about what's great in the province of Saskatchewan. They don't want to celebrate the province of Saskatchewan. They just want to narrow in on those issues which they think can be divisive in the province of Saskatchewan.

Well we're not a government that believes in dividing people.

We're a government that believes in uniting people and bringing out progress for the people of Saskatchewan whether you're working people or business people, farming people, seniors, youth. We have the challenge of governing for the people of Saskatchewan and we accept that challenge gladly.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well someone has issued the applause command.

Mr. Chairman, I have another quote for the Premier from when he was running to be the leader of the NDP party, from when he was trying to become the premier of Saskatchewan.

And he was asked, he was asked about how he would include people in the process, how he would improve consultation with people. And here's what he said. Calvert said, "The legislature needs to . . ." And this is from his website it looks like, from when he was running. It's from your website. Here's what it says. Calvert said and I'm quoting, "The legislature needs to be more inclusive of people when making laws." That's what you said on your website.

He's proposing to open up the committee to the whole stage of Bill passing to citizens who want to speak for or against a Bill in the legislature.

Well you will know, Mr. Premier, that not a week ago there was a citizen, a human resources specialist in the province, who is very interested in Bill 87. A citizen of Saskatchewan, the same kind of individual you're referring to on your website when you're running to be the leader. And he came to the committee of the legislature and he wanted to be a witness. He wanted to offer his input to the minister and to your government. And do you know what your members did on the committee? I hope you follow it close enough to know that they defeated a motion to listen to him, to even let him comment on the Bill.

Now the Premier says in his answer, well I wonder why the opposition is spending so much time on this. Whether it's regarding 13.4 or Bill 87, well yes, there is a debate to be held about the legislation we're talking about. But here is the sad reality. The Premier doesn't understand that why we are spending a lot of time on this is not so much about even the very important Bills and legislation we're talking about, it's about his ability or the ability of the people of the province to trust what he has to say. It's about how he does one thing and says another. It's about how he consistently, Mr. Chairman, promises something and then breaks his promise.

And that's why we're spending a lot of time on it. And here's a news flash for the Premier. We will continue to spend a lot of time on this because the people of the province are sick and tired of broken promises, Mr. Chairman. They're sick and tired of them.

So how does he square this circle? He promises more witnesses before the committee, that citizens should come before the committee of the legislature. That's what he said and then his party votes a witness down. Why did he do that?

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. Hon. members, if I could . . . Order. Order. Order. If I could just remind hon. members

. . . Members, just to call members to order. Just to remind members that Committee of Finance is usually a little bit lax on the rules but I would ask members to put their comments to the Chair and through the Chair. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I have now received a very detailed, a very detailed account of the consultation process that went on around the most available hours legislation because the members opposite, the members opposite suggested there was no consultation took place. Well let me just for the members' benefit . . . Now I know they will likely say this isn't consultation but I think the members of the general public would judge it differently.

This Minister of Labour sent our 119 stakeholder letters inviting people to contact the Department of Labour, to contact herself to arrange meetings — 119 stakeholder groups. This is around the most available hours, Mr. Chair.

Then on the most available hours debate, she sent a letter . . . We'll be very happy to table copies of all of these letters if you folks would table the information that you use. We've asked for a couple of tablings tonight. I'd like to have the same response from . . . These are not the letters. These are not the letters. These are the facts. I will send it over. You bet I'll send it over.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, this minister sent a letter to every business in the province — every business in the province — enclosing a fact sheet about the proposed regulations and invited them to telephone her for a copy, a full copy of the regulations. They were then invited to make submissions up and to and including to January 28, 2005.

Now, Mr. Chair, this Minister of Labour had 42 meetings, 42 meetings with individual workers and employers, with unions, with students, with business groups, the chamber of commerce, labour groups, district labour councils, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, anti-poverty groups, women's groups, and representatives of Aboriginal people. And we can provide the full list of those who attended those meetings.

In addition to 119 letters and invitations to stakeholder groups, to a letter to every business in the province, to 42 very public meetings, she received and the department received 210 submissions and had over 30 telephone discussions. Now, Mr. Chair, that is consultation. That is consultation.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And it's consultation that went on with the people of Saskatchewan. When the ministry of Labour introduced into this House Bills 86 and 87 last fall, it gave opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan to make comment. They made comment, Mr. Chair. They made important comment. We listened to that comment. It was reflected in some of the change that was put into the Bill. The Bill has been passed by this legislature because it's good legislation for the people of Saskatchewan, no matter what the Saskatchewan Conservative Party may think of it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to change topics and hopefully just for a couple of minutes. As Chair of the Public Accounts, we work with the Provincial Auditor's office. And on January 8 the Public Accounts Committee dealt with and heard witness from the deputy minister for the Department of Environment.

And, Mr. Chair, I would say to the Premier that I was very pleased with the co-operation that we had on that occasion from the deputy minister of Environment because this meeting occurred just after it became public that an employee had perhaps fraudulently taken money from the Department of Environment that was not hers.

Now, Mr. Chair and Mr. Premier, we recognize that the vast majority, almost all of the public servants in Saskatchewan are law-abiding, conscientious, hard-working people that give their best efforts for the province of Saskatchewan. But the Provincial Auditor noted that since 1998, the Department of Environment had been lax as well as the Department of Community Resources and Employment had been lax in making sure that proper procedures were followed.

Mr. Premier, we had a commitment from the deputy minister of Environment and agreed by all members of the Public Accounts Committee for the Provincial Auditor to investigate and bring a report back to Public Accounts Committee. That has been done. And we have plans to review that report in the month of June. I would just like a commitment from the Premier that we would have that same co-operation from his government to also look into the matter of the perhaps fraudulent use of public funds in the Department of Community Resources and Employment after the auditor's report is made public in about a week or two.

So could we have from the Premier a commitment for the same co-operation for a hearing in the Public Accounts Committee in June that we received from his members on the Public Accounts Committee for the Environment department issue?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I welcome the question and the presentation by the former leader of the opposition. It's refreshing to have a reasonable approach here.

What we have here is some very, very good work being done by our Provincial Auditor. We've seen that work in regards to the Department of the Environment. This is a circumstance that no one in this legislature wants to tolerate with public dollars. If there has been a misappropriation of funds by an individual or others in any department of government we want that, we want that rooted out.

The fact of the matter is we have, I think, two issues here. There have been practices identified by the auditor that have not been sufficient and those practices are being changed, have been changed and are being changed. We also have a circumstance where perhaps an individual or two has taken advantage of their position in the public service and there may be some misappropriation of monies and it's . . . we welcome the work of the auditor in determining this and the ongoing work of course of the police forces, the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], in terms of any ongoing investigation.

[22:30]

To the very specific question put by the former leader of the opposition, we will have . . . the auditor is doing . . . I understand . . . as I understand it, the auditor is now doing the work with the Department of Social Services and that will be as public as the work that he's done with the Department of the Environment.

But it's his timetable. It's not our timetable. You know, I'm not wanting to suggest that he ought to hurry or delay or anything like that. It's his timetable. But when that report is available it will be as public as the report from Environment.

Mr. Hermanson: — I would like to thank the Premier for the answer, Mr. Chair. But the auditor has already committed that there will be a report in his upcoming volume to be released, I believe it's June 6 or 7.

All I'm asking from you, Mr. Premier, is you'll make . . . your government will make the same commitment that we have agreed to in Public Accounts to deal with the Environment department issue. In the month of June, we can have that same opportunity to deal with the Department of Community Resources and Employment. Just asking for the same commitment, because the report is coming. We know that.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, absolutely is yes. But at the auditor's timetable. When it comes, it'll be there. Yes.

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

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of Committees. I'd like to talk a little bit about, or ask some questions with respect to health care in the province of Saskatchewan. Specifically, Mr. Chairman, there is a growing concern across the province in the various regions, in the health regions, about how the government's health care system is treating nurses and the impact of that treatment then on patient care.

We've heard the Health minister say time and time again that we have the correct number of nurses; the staffing levels are fine in the province of Saskatchewan. And yet, Mr. Chair of Committees, we also know that region after region reports significant overtime hours for nurses. Nurses are being asked to work overtime. We know that. We know also that nurses are also, Mr. Chair, being asked to waive their holidays or not take their holidays. And yet we have the example of region after region in Saskatchewan hiring casual, staffing only in casual positions, not providing full-time employment.

Now a little while ago we had a debate about the government's failed bid to introduce government-directed hours. You know, it may want to lead by example rather than trying to legislate. And one area where it could lead by example is in the area of health care where patient care is potentially being impacted by the amount of work nurses have to do.

Why, if the correct staffing levels exist as the Health minister maintains, why are nurses continually being asked to work overtime in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I think, as the public is well aware, we've taken some very, very significant steps in just the last few years in providing greater opportunities for people to

nurse in health care, to provide significant new training opportunities for those who will move into the nursing profession.

I recognize from my own conversations with nurses that there are yet issues of overtime that exist in the system that we need to deal with. Now some of that overtime is in fact requested and appreciated by nurses; some of it is not. And as we increase the number of nurses available through the training programs, through the new levels of funding, as we deal with issues in the workplace there is significant dollars in this budget to create more healthy workplaces for all of our health care providers. As in this budget provides significant new funding for nurse training positions across the province. We're taking this challenge on.

We have a circumstance today, Mr. Chair, today in the province where our vacancy rate in nursing is at an all-time low, less than 1 per cent. We have been able to decrease the amount of overtime being worked. It has decreased by 12.73 per cent since 2002-03. We recognize there is still more work to do.

This budget, the budget that's under debate in this legislature, has significant new resources to take on some of these challenges in nursing and in health care and again I invite the Leader of the Opposition, I invite members opposite to support the budget or explain to the nurses, explain to the people of Saskatchewan why they would vote against these new resources for the very important work of health care in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: — It now being past 10:30, committee should rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again. Thank you.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, the committee has asked me to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

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

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

The Deputy Speaker: — Next sitting. It being past 10:30 this House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:37.]

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