



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. Don Toth
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Lorne Calvert

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Brotten, Cam	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Calvert, Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
D'Autremont, Hon. Dan	SP	Cannington
Draude, Hon. June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Hon. Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Furber, Darcy	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
Gantfoer, Hon. Rod	SP	Melfort
Harpauer, Hon. Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Harrison, Jeremy	SP	Meadow Lake
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Hon. Nancy	SP	Martensville
Hickie, Hon. Darryl	SP	Prince Albert Carlton
Higgins, Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Hutchinson, Hon. Bill	SP	Regina South
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Krawetz, Hon. Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
LeClerc, Serge	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMillan, Tim	SP	Lloydminster
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Hon. Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Greg	SP	Yorkton
Quennell, Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Reiter, Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Laura	SP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Schriemer, Joceline	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Tell, Hon. Christine	SP	Regina Wascana Plains
Toth, Hon. Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Vermette, Doyle	NDP	Cumberland
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce my other daughter, Lacey Wilson. She's pursuing her communications disorder degree at Minot State, North Dakota. And so I'm very pleased to have her here today. And the other lady on the right is my daughter-in-law, Katie Wilson. And she has her degree at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], majoring in animal science. So they're both good farm girls.

And because it's Agribition, I'd like to mention they're both in 4-H . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh yes, and Katie is due with my first grandbaby.

So I'd like everyone to give them a warm welcome to their Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, in your gallery, a good friend of mine, Don McCallum from Cut Knife.

Don is not only a good friend, he's also a long-time colleague. He's the current president of the RM [rural municipality] administrators' association. And I'd ask all my colleagues in the House to please give him a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloyd.

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you I'd like to introduce you to the Paradise Hill 4-H Club. They have made the long trip down here. Every spring my family think it's a highlight to go to the achievement day at Fort Pitt. So I'm very pleased they're here. In fact they're the first group who has made the long journey from Lloydminster, so I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I present petitions on behalf of

the residents of Saskatchewan regarding minimum wage and the indexing of minimum wage.

And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to indexing Saskatchewan minimum wage to ensure that the standard of living of minimum wage earners is maintained in the face of the cost of living increases.

And as duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the petitions are signed people of, residents of the province of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today as well to present a petition. This one is in support of affordable housing for Saskatchewan seniors. I'd like to read the prayer.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to act as quickly as possible to expand affordable housing options for Saskatchewan's senior citizens.

I do so present. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition concerning the high cost of post-secondary education.

The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to increase funding for post-secondary students and help to alleviate the large financial burden placed on students for pursuing a post-secondary education at a Saskatchewan institution.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition was circulated by the Canadian Federation of Students, the University of Regina Students' Union, the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union, and First Nations University of Canada Students' Association. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Gift of the Horse

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this past Tuesday a special ceremony took place at the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] Heritage Centre. It was the Gifting of a Horse Ceremony, Mr. Speaker.

The Gifting of the Horse Ceremony is the highest honour that First Nations people can bestow on an individual. The recipient of this high honour, Mr. Speaker, was Corporal Tim Schwartz, an RCMP officer. He received it from the Ittakoose family for all the help that he gave to the family after the killing of their son, Michael, which happened in September 2007 in Fort Qu'Appelle.

It's believed, Mr. Speaker, that's the first time that an RCMP officer has received such a high award. What made this special day for Corporal Schwartz extra special was the fact that his parents, Don and Joan Schwartz, could be in attendance.

Don and Joan Schwartz are constituents of mine. They live in the community of Southey, but in order for Tim's dad, Don, to get to this ceremony, the family had to help him from his hospital bed in the Pasqua Hospital so that he could see his son receive this award. And I know it meant the world to Tim's father Don to see his son receive this special award.

Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform the Assembly that Tim's father Don passed away early this morning. I visited him on Wednesday night, and he told me how grateful he was and how special it was to be there with his son. He'll be sorely missed by his family and all of us that knew him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Saskatoon Church Offers Hospitality

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, November 22, I had the pleasure of attending and speaking at a breakfast hosted by West Portal Church, which is located in the heart of Saskatoon Massey Place on 33rd Street West. While I do not attend this church, many of my constituents do. I truly appreciated the opportunity to connect with people I had not met before, as well as the chance to have more lengthy conversations with some of the people I already had the pleasure of meeting.

While our province is a diverse place, sometimes the rule of six degrees of separation is more like two or three when meeting new people in Saskatchewan. This became clear to me through the conversations I had that morning.

Mr. Speaker, the many faith communities in Saskatchewan play an important role in making our province a great place to live. While all faith groups help to provide spiritual meaning to their

members through friendship, teaching, and ritual, these diverse communities also share an outward focus on the broader community. West Portal Church is no exception to this reality, and their invitation to me is part of their larger effort to stay engaged and better understand the community they live in.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Pastor Steve Savage for the opportunity to speak with West Portal Church community, and thank all of the breakfast attendees for their hospitality last Saturday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Meadow Lake.

Festival of Trees Supports Meadow Lake Hospital Foundation

Mr. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the Meadow Lake Hospital Foundation for what could be described as the Meadow Lake social event of the year. On Saturday evening, the citizens of Meadow Lake demonstrated their support and their huge generosity at the annual Festival of Trees. During this gala event, a live auction was held with cash donations, hundreds of people attending, and raising nearly \$36,000.

The Festival of Trees is a huge undertaking by the Meadow Lake Hospital Foundation and a huge success towards health care, demonstrating our community's great commitment. Every year the event gets bigger and better due to the hard work of the Hospital Foundation board and others. Board members include Norman Deutscher, Don Marsh, Gerry Pohl, Dr. Colin Honish, Sally Carlson, Marilyn Goll, and Donna Ritco.

Words are hard to find that would adequately describe the pride of the community for the efforts towards this cause. Thank you and congratulations to the Meadow Lake Hospital Foundation for the success of this event, and grateful appreciation to the businesses and citizens who supported the cause so generously.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

St. Joan of Arc School Leadership Conference

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, on Thursday last week, my colleague from Regina Rosemont and I had the privilege and pleasure of being invited to participate in the St. Joan of Arc School leadership conference.

The program involved four presenters who gave presentations on communications from four perspectives: community leadership, religious influence, female member of the legislature, and the effect of logos. The presentations were informative, interactive, and in some cases quite humorous.

One such example was an experiment to see how, when a message is passed along through many people, it can take a very interesting turn. The message started out as — with apologies to the member for Regina Rosemont — quote “Trent

Wotherspoon likes to read Captain Underpants.” Well, Mr. Speaker, the message changed at one point to read quote “Trent Wotherspoon likes to count his underpants.”

The students came to understand that our own beliefs, influences, and experiences cause us to understand what we hear in different ways. The students were energetic and engaged, and I’m proud to report that I saw examples of many future leaders of this province.

Mr. Speaker, St. Joan of Arc School is a prime example of the wonderful and creative initiatives that are being undertaken every day by people who have such strong influence and impact on our children. I would like to invite all of my colleagues to commend the principal, Anne Lutz, and all of the teachers, presenters, and students who took part in a very successful leadership conference at St. Joan of Arc School.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Outstanding Citizen Recognized

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, it’s my privilege to rise in the House today to recognize an outstanding Saskatchewan resident. Grant Kook of Saskatoon has a long history of community involvement in our city. On November 12, I was pleased to attend this year’s B’nai Brith silver dinner where his commitment and dedication to our city and province were recognized. The B’nai Brith We’re Proud of You Award is given annually to a Saskatoon citizen who provides an exceptional level of volunteer service to the city. Grant Kook is certainly a very worthy recipient.

Mr. Speaker, Grant Kook has served as director of the Children’s Health & Hospital Foundation for the past seven years and is currently the vice-president of sponsorship for the 2010 world junior hockey committee. He has volunteered in a significant capacity with a number of important organizations and events, including the 2008 Mike Weir Miracle Golf Drive for Kids, the 2006 Potash Corporation Vanier Cup, the 2004 Nokia Brier, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Saskatchewan. And that, Mr. Speaker, barely scratches the surface.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Grant Kook on receiving this prestigious award, and I ask all members to show their appreciation for the efforts that Grant Kook has made to our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Keewatin Onitnikewuk Search and Rescue

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, KOSAR [Keewatin Onitnikewuk Search and Rescue] is a ground search and rescue organization that works with RCMP with a common goal of locating missing persons. It was formerly recognized as a non-profit organization in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, the success of KOSAR is dependent on the efforts of a large number of volunteers. It is thanks to them that KOSAR has been instrumental in success of over 100-plus searches that have taken place over the last 11 years.

Mr. Speaker, the actual searches are conducted by groups called hasty teams made up of concerned and committed people from communities of Stanley Mission, Hall Lake, Grandmother’s Bay, Sucker River, Air Ronge, La Ronge.

Mr. Speaker, the development and success of KOSAR is linked to the vision and leadership of people such as the late Big Jim McKenzie and the late Jack Pevach, who seen a necessity for a search and rescue service to take action to meet the need.

Mr. Speaker, without the generous support of organizations such as La Ronge credit union, Lac la Ronge Indian Band, the Government of Saskatchewan, Cameco, AREVA, and numerous others, KOSAR could not carry out its important work.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking the executive, the board of directors, the hasty teams, and all volunteers of KOSAR for their dedication and hard work and in recognizing the important role they play in ensuring the health and safety of citizens and visitors to northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Natural Resources and Economic Development

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP [New Democratic Party] didn’t get it a year ago when the people of Saskatchewan voted for change, and they still don’t get it today.

A man the members opposite hold in high esteem has written a book. In that book, former NDP premier, Allan Blakeney, shed some light on how he would respond to record demand for Saskatchewan’s natural resources. And I quote:

Don’t make the mistake of selling something like oil for the benefit of getting economic development. Most of the economic development from oil ends up in Calgary or outside Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, he obviously hasn’t spent any time recently in many of the constituencies served by members of this side of the House. Thanks to a record demand for Saskatchewan oil and gas, we are seeing more economic activity than we have in half a century.

To Mr. Blakeney and the members opposite: welcome to 2008 where our government is taking steps which ensure Saskatchewan people do benefit from the sale of our natural resources through historic tax cuts, record debt reduction, and the largest ever infrastructure investment in Saskatchewan history. All this, Mr. Speaker, making the quality of life better for all the citizens of this great province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:15]

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

Mr. Michelson: — Permission to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member has asked for leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. I recognize the member from Moose Jaw North.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in your gallery are 27 students from the fine city of Moose Jaw. They're grade 11 and 12 students from Peacock, and they'll be observing the procedures today.

Accompanying with them is their teachers, Keisha Mohr, Carrie Kiefer, and Mike Alexanderson. And I'd the Assembly to make them welcome.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Homes for Foster Children

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was reported last month that children are being housed in hotel rooms because many of the province's current foster homes are crowded and can't take any more children. At the time the minister minimized the problem, telling the media that only one child has been put up in a hotel room since June.

We now know that there's been at least 12 in the last year, seven of those in October alone, and the problem is getting worse. In fact I'm told that there've already been nine in November.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Social Services: does the minister believe that a hotel room is an appropriate place to raise a child? And why did she try to minimize the seriousness of this problem?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I told the media at the time, I absolutely do not believe that a hotel room is an appropriate place to raise a child. However we must remember that they're in a safer place for that one night or two nights than they were in the situation that they were removed from, and the ultimate safety of the child is of primary

importance to this government.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there was one youth, one 14-year-old youth housed at the time that I had that interview, and then after that, in October, there was a family of six children. They were housed for a short period of time in a hotel and then reunited with their family once the situation was corrected.

Have I admitted to a shortage in foster families within this province? Absolutely I have. It is a concern. I have talked about it with the Children's Advocate. I have talked about it with Vice-chief Guy Lonechild with FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations]. And we are continuing to try to address the issue through a number of initiatives. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hotel rooms are not the only temporary accommodation the ministry has been forced to arrange for these children. I'm told that some of these children have been placed in a daycare centre for several days at a time. In one case a child lived in a daycare centre for five weeks. That is not the purpose of daycare centres, Mr. Speaker. Daycare centres are places where children can be housed for hours at a time. A daycare centre should not become a child's home for days or weeks at a time.

To the minister: why are some of these province's most vulnerable children living in a daycare centre?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The answer is, Mr. Speaker, because there was a file that was neglected for a very long time. And so when I became minister, I was using methods that was used by the previous government, which is emergency housing for children to keep them safe. It's not something that the NDP were not doing when they were the government. And what did they do to expand capacity? Not a lot.

We now have the PRIDE [parent resources for information, development, and education] course implemented for foster families to help them with support. We have also — which is unprecedented in our country — we have incorporated a First Nations element within that training to help families understand the culture of First Nations, even if we can't always place First Nations children in First Nations homes. We are going to aggressively try to recruit but also retain foster families. And we are looking at group homes, expansion in group homes for youth. Mr. Speaker, we are trying to address a problem that's been neglected for a very, very long time.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, these are the facts. In 2007, Mr. Speaker, the former NDP government set aside five and a half million dollars to create new group home and facility

spaces. It's been more than a year since this money's been set aside, Mr. Speaker, and this minister has made some announcements, including funding for Egadz to purchase two new homes, but most of that money has never been spent.

To the Minister of Social Services: what is this minister's plan for increasing the number of spaces for children at risk?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan is to continue to give as much support as we can to our existing foster families. It is to work with the leaders, both First Nations with the Foster Family Association who is working diligently. It is to provide more supports for our foster families, and it will be in expanding in group home situations for youth.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, we now know that on several occasions child protection workers have been forced to provide 24-hour care and supervision for children in temporary care facilities. Many of these children are deeply troubled, and having to adjust to several different caregivers in the span of a few days isn't helping. Concerns have been expressed that this situation puts the safety of both children and workers at risk.

To the minister: what is she doing to address the safety concerns of both children and the hard-working child protection workers?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would like to assure everyone that the children are safe, and to imply that the workers are not keeping them safe is appalling, Mr. Speaker. Those children are being kept safe by very, very, very competent workers.

It is not against the collective bargaining agreement with the workers. And yes, they are working in some of these emergency facilities. Dales House has taken over some of the emergency work, and there was a time period where we used Social Services workers to look after the children while Dales House, which is a community-based organization, were able to train and hire more workers to handle the caseload.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Term Length for Elected Officials

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the 2008 SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] convention passed a resolution requesting that the

term for municipal councillors in Saskatchewan be extended from three to four years. On November 18, the minister told this Assembly that he's decided not to change the length of office for urban and northern municipal and school board officials at this time.

To the minister: why is he rejecting a recommendation adopted democratically at the last SUMA convention?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure after such a long time to be finally able to address the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow about municipal affairs.

We're not abandoning any resolution from SUMA at all. We recognize that the folks from SUMA and the folks from New North certainly support the idea of extending municipal terms and school board terms from three years to four years. On the other hand, in the way of doing public consultation, we found some contrary views and other folks that aren't entirely convinced that changing the terms are the right thing to do.

So what does a responsible government do, Mr. Speaker? The responsible government says, let's sit down and talk with these folks a little bit longer and come to the right conclusion.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, in the minister's second reading speech, he spoke of others who have expressed concern, much the same as he just has now. Mr. Speaker, we can't help wonder who these other folks are or who these some people might be. So to the minister: is he consulting? Who has he consulted outside of the municipal and education sectors before deciding to reject SUMA's request, and just who are these other folks?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Golly, Mr. Speaker, who are they kidding? You've got to wonder who writes this stuff. The people that we're asking are the people who live in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, a foreign concept to the opposition, obviously. That's why they're there; that's why we're here. We decided that the respectful thing to do would be to ask the public of Saskatchewan what do you in fact think of this interesting proposal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we in the opposition believe in consulting with the general public as well as the

stakeholders directly affected with the policy changes. We're concerned that this government's definition of stakeholders seems to be vague at best. To the minister: why would they consult people other than the people directly affected and the duly elected municipal leaders who voted for and presented this recommendation? Again who are the other folks or the some people that they're taking advice from?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, just because it's written on a page doesn't mean you have to read it. I would put it this way simply and clearly. The people that we're consulting are twofold. The folks that are elected, the elected representatives of SUMA and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and the New North and also another interesting group of people called the public of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. It's as simple as that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

AgriStability Program

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, AgriStability is moving from Regina to Melville — well maybe. Agriculture Canada has said and I quote, "Since the proposal has not yet been fully assessed or agreed to, we do not have an assessment of the impact which the provincial delivery proposal would have on jobs in Winnipeg and Regina."

To the minister: normally small details such as an agreement by both parties are in place before an announcement is made, before a Throne Speech refers to it, and before the minister tells the House that the federal government is going to cost share this move. Can you please tell us why you have announced this before you have an agreement with the federal government?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, why I have announced this is because I have had conversations on a number of occasions, a number of meetings with the federal Minister of Agriculture who is committed to assist us with moving the CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] AgriStability administration to Saskatchewan, in fact, Mr. Speaker, to go as far as to even cost share in the movement of the program back.

So we also are in negotiations with the federal government to make sure this is a smooth transaction, and that's the negotiations that are taking place today.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon

Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has been very busy making an announcement about the possibility of making an announcement. How is the minister . . . why is the minister telling us that he's moving AgriStability from Regina to Melville when the federal government hasn't formally agreed to it? Can the minister please indicate when the federal government is going to officially agree to this move?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'll go by whatever the federal Agriculture minister says, and he has committed to cost share and support us in that movement. Mr. Speaker, the federal minister is in charge, and I go by what he says.

But the member is right, Mr. Speaker. We have made a number of announcements over the past year, far more than the NDP opposition did in 16 years. Let's do a little review of all those announcements, Mr. Speaker. Crop insurance review, Mr. Speaker, there's an announcement I . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've made a number of announcements. Another announcement we made was bringing AgriStability administration to Saskatchewan. The member is aware of this. Why are we doing that? Because the NDP wouldn't . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure that these questions actually have anything to do with agriculture. I think they may have more to do with the member for Nutana's leadership bid and the anything-but-Link campaign.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Atkinson: — . . . confidence in the Agriculture critic. Well, Mr. Speaker, livestock producers are in crisis. They've asked for immediate financial aid, and the minister has given them a big fat nothing. In response to their requests for aid, the minister has said he's helping them by bringing AgriStability back to Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no agreement in place to move AgriStability to Saskatchewan.

Is the minister so desperate to convince livestock producers he's doing something for them that he's making an announcement before he has any agreements in place?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member has paid close attention to what the leaders of the cattle industry in this province are saying, I'll remind her of some of the quotes:

Saskatchewan's cattle producers are pleased with Agriculture minister Bob Bjornerud's announcement last week to bring the administration of AgriStability — formerly known as [the] CAIS [program] — home to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Jack Hextall: "One of the first things that cattle industry representatives requested from . . ."

The Speaker: — Order. I'm going to get the Minister of Education up here. His voice projects better. Order. I recognize the Minister of Agriculture to complete his comments.

[10:30]

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, another quote. And I quote from Jack Hextall. He's the president of the SCA [Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association]:

"One of the first things that cattle industry representatives requested from the newly elected provincial government last November was to bring the administration of AgriStability home to Saskatchewan . . . And we applaud . . . [the minister for doing that]."

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

Ms. Atkinson: — I have a quote for the minister. And here's the quote, and it came this morning from a producer that lives in Last Mountain-Touchwood. And I quote: "This program isn't doing anything for us, no matter where it's located."

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've spoken with livestock producers about the reality of this program. This program does nothing for livestock people who are in a financial crisis, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when is the minister going to get on the telephone or fly to Ottawa along with his backbenchers that represent the livestock industry and change the program so that the program works for livestock producers in this province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, that is without a doubt one of the most amazing questions I have ever heard.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, who helped design that program? It was the three or four past NDP Agriculture ministers who were non-existent at the table and wouldn't fund the program. Mr. Speaker, they helped design the program that the member opposite seems to have so much problem with.

We've been in power one year and we're dealing, Mr. Speaker, with 8,000 unprocessed AgriStability applications. That didn't happen just this year, Mr. Speaker, that's been going on for 16

years.

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

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, this minister has spent the entire session looking in the rear-view mirror, Mr. Speaker. There are 4.5 million cattle that are coming down the road, and he better look out, Mr. Speaker, because he just might get run over.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what has the province done for livestock producers? Nothing. What has the federal government done for livestock producers? Nothing. What is AgriStability doing for livestock producers? Nothing. When is that minister going to get out of his chair, go to Ottawa, and change the terms of the program so that it works for people?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure but maybe Link should be writing the questions over there. The ones these members are asking aren't all that good.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the members opposite just what cattle prices are this year and just what cattle prices were last year. And the member should pay attention because she's going to need this in her leadership campaign if she's going to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, D1, D2 slaughter cows in '04 were on average about \$281 per head. In '08, \$548 per head. So if there's a crisis today, there was a crisis in '04, '05, '06, and '07. What did the members opposite do? Absolutely nothing because of course they were ignoring rural Saskatchewan. Now they've got a leadership campaign going on, and they're going back out to rural Saskatchewan to actually see if they do have any support left at all out there.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Purchase of Fuel-Efficient Vehicles

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Working with rural Saskatchewan, working with producers, the former NDP government, with much success, built a biofuels industry in this province. And so, Mr. Speaker, my questions relate to that development, and they are first to the Minister of Government Services. I would invite the Minister of Government Services to stand . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I ask the members to come to order so that we can hear the question placed and the answer, the response to the question. I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Government Services to stand in the House this morning and

describe for the people of Saskatchewan his government's policy respecting the purchase of environmentally friendly, flex-fuel E85 vehicles.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I remember the former administration's efforts to deal with ethanol industry in Saskatchewan. I remember the announcement out at Belle Plaine where the former premier, the current Leader of the Opposition, went out to make the announcement, Mr. Speaker, just before the election. And what was the net result of that, Mr. Speaker? It was a hole in the ground with two scoops from the backhoe and a big sign. And that was it, Mr. Speaker. There is no ethanol industry at Belle Plaine, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is no Broe ethanol industry, Mr. Speaker, that . . .

The Speaker: — I'll ask members one more time to come to order, or we will just bypass the rest of question period. The member for Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, apparently the minister doesn't know the policy of government around E85 flex-fuel and fuel-efficient vehicles because he didn't mention the policy. And apparently he doesn't know that there is a very large ethanol plant at Belle Plaine, Saskatchewan called Terra Grains, Mr. Speaker.

Well if the minister doesn't know the policy of the Sask Party on this issue, let me share it with him. Mr. Speaker, this is a quote from the Sask Party campaign document, their platform under go green. The Sask Party pledge to quote “. . . ensure that all new vehicles purchased by the provincial government are hybrid or high fuel efficiency vehicles.”

And as recently as the Sask Party convention, the minister was asked the very same question in the context of his own convention, and he reported to the delegates at their convention, quote “. . . that vehicles that run on gas are all E85 vehicles.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask the minister responsible: is it the fact that all new vehicles purchased by this government and being driven by ministers of the Crown are today E85 fuel-efficient vehicles?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, there is no Broe ethanol industry out at Belle Plaine. There is an industry though that my colleague, the Minister of Energy, made an announcement about that is up and running, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are purchasing E85 flex-fuel vehicles in the fleet as we replace, but not all vehicles are, Mr. Speaker. But all of them are in the top 20 per cent of efficiency in their classes,

Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have looked at the hybrids. They are not as efficient as they need to be for our use, because we operate mainly on the highways. In fact as even the former premier, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition had a hybrid vehicle which he traded off, Mr. Speaker, for one of the new, high-efficiency Jeeps that we have now in the fleet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are meeting our mandate of purchasing vehicles that are in the top 20 per cent of fuel efficiency in this province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is this: that a vehicle is provided to the Leader of the Opposition — that's been a long tradition — and in fact the central vehicle agency did provide to me one of the Jeep Liberty 3.7-litre V6 vehicles. When it was drawn to my attention, Mr. Speaker, by my staff, that this vehicle in fact did not match the policy of government, the central vehicle agency were kind enough to provide me with a vehicle that does match the policy of government.

Now we've got a very interesting situation here. The New Democratic Party caucus and the New Democratic Party leader is supporting the Sask Party's policy around vehicles. But the Sask Party and its cabinet is not supporting the Sask Party policy.

So the question, Mr. Speaker, is: when will the Sask Party begin to support and adhere to its own policy?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for First Nations and Métis Affairs.

Support for Northern Communities

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague across the House asked a question and I wasn't able to respond the other day, and I'm now tabling the answer.

Mr. Speaker, our government is very excited about the opportunities in Saskatchewan, and specifically in northern Saskatchewan. And I want to address some of the issues that we as a province are providing northern people.

The Government of Saskatchewan is investing \$6.3 million over four years into the northern career quest program. And it's part of the federal government and provincial government and industry partnership that's actually \$33 million for skills and Aboriginal development, and it's going to affect 1,500 Aboriginal people.

Last year Meadow Lake Tribal Council received \$1.67 million. And you know that last year this government, in the first year

that we became government, we spent 30 per cent more on highways and infrastructure in the constituencies of Cumberland and Athabasca than the NDP did in their last year when they were government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I want to remind the House and remind ministers that ministers should respond to the question that's placed, and then ministers can respond to the notice that's given. So I'm going to recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

Purchase of Fuel-Efficient Vehicles

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are indeed following the government's mandate of 20 per cent top fuel-efficient vehicles. We are purchasing flex-fuels, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the use of the vehicles, the former administration were urban-centric or they flew, Mr. Speaker.

Our members live across rural Saskatchewan. We travel on gravel roads and snowy roads, Mr. Speaker. There is a safety factor involved there, so in practical Saskatchewan realities, Mr. Speaker, we are providing vehicles for the use by both the Leader of the Opposition and the ministers that suit Saskatchewan's need for fuel-efficient vehicles and safe vehicles, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Saskatchewan Credit Rating Upgrade

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer some excellent news to this Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan. After barely one year in office, Mr. Speaker, our government has received a credit rating upgrade.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — That's right, Mr. Speaker. Standard & Poor's today boosted Saskatchewan's long-term rating for the province from AA to AA positive with a stable outlook.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — This is independent confirmation that our government is on the right financial path, Mr. Speaker. We're being recognized for an emphasis on paying down debt in a responsible manner and overall strong financial performance.

Mr. Speaker, let me share with the Assembly some of the comments S & P [Standard & Poor's] made in its November 26 news release. They said that "The upgrade reflects [and I quote] strong financial results in fiscal 2008 and a low-and-steadily declining debt burden . . ." The release goes on to say quote

"Saskatchewan produced what we believe are standout financial results in fiscal 2008 (year ended March 31), with a very strong operating and after-capital surpluses."

Mr. Speaker, this S & P release also says, and I quote, "The stable outlook reflects our expectation that the province will continue to generate solid operating surpluses . . ."

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'll ask members to come to order so that the minister can present his ministerial statement. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — "The economy is expected to decelerate albeit at a slower pace than that experienced by the rest of the country." And S & P has also cited strong economic performance, a strong labour force, and an increase in population as contributing factors for the upgrade.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:45]

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, some might wonder what does a credit rating upgrade really mean. Credit rating upgrades are significant because the higher the credit rating of an issuer, in this case the province, the lower the cost of borrowing. As well a higher credit rating attracts a broader group of investors who can purchase Saskatchewan issues. The higher the rating, the lower the risk. Also certain investors require minimum credit ratings.

Mr. Speaker, credit rating upgrades provide independent, third party validation that we're managing our finances in a responsible way on behalf of Saskatchewan people. Our government is working hard for the people of this province, and they're seeing results through debt paydown, tax cuts, enhancements to social programs, a commitment to boost our infrastructure to support our booming economy, and numerous other initiatives.

We're seeing high employment rates, population increases, and prediction that we'll lead the country in economic this year and next year, Mr. Speaker. This upgrade is just the most recent good news in a very long list of good news relating to Saskatchewan since we've taken office, Mr. Speaker. And we look forward, we look forward to good news continuing as long as we're the government of this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the minister for the courtesy of providing me with a copy of his statement prior to the House convening today.

I was interested and struck at the outset by the minister's comment that after barely over — I guess that's more than — one year in office, our government has received a credit rating upgrade. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that prior to this

government assuming office, the previous government experienced no less than 16 credit rating upgrades over a period of 12 years, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — So I think, given the massive surplus that this government inherited, given the oil-generated revenue explosion that we've seen in the course of the last year, I think that Saskatchewan people expect no less than this credit rating upgrade, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I was also interested to note that the minister says, "This upgrade is just the most recent good news in a very long list of good news relating to Saskatchewan since we've taken office." Now I just want to underline that "since we've taken office," Mr. Speaker.

Well the implications of that, that there was no good news before the government took office, Mr. Speaker. And I would say, if that's the position the government's taking, then they are attempting to rewrite history. The fact of the matter is that we were seeing the high employment rates the minister was speaking of before they assumed office. We were seeing the population increases before they assumed office. And Saskatchewan was leading the country in economic growth before they assumed office, Mr. Speaker. And of course they inherited that huge surplus, Mr. Speaker, to start things off on a good footing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they may seek to rewrite history, but the fact of the matter is it was the NDP that led this province from bankruptcy to a boom, Mr. Speaker. And we're all hopeful that they don't reverse that direction.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, the last time that there was a ministerial statement with respect to a credit rating upgrade in this Legislative Assembly was in 2002, in May 2002. And at that point, the Minister of Finance indicated that Saskatchewan had received yet another credit rating upgrade. These things became par for the course. We expected no less in those days because of the financial management of the NDP government.

But here was the very curious and interesting response of the Sask Party member at that time who stood up to respond to the minister, and here is what he had to say: "This, Mr. Speaker, is a really good example of why we need to have summary financial statements in place in this province."

And without getting into the details of that, Mr. Speaker, I just note the irony that yesterday, the government members of the Public Accounts Committee said no, no, no, we don't want any summary financial statement planning in this province, and voted down a motion to that effect, Mr. Speaker. So another case of them having a great idea in opposition, but bad in government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the credit rating upgrade is good news for the people of Saskatchewan, but the government's over-the-top rhetoric does nothing but to diminish their credibility, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Corporations.

Provincial Communication System Enhancements

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members are correct — more good news. As you know, in the recent Throne Speech our government announced its commitment to ensuring that our provincial communication system meets the growing education, health, and business needs of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, I have personally spoken with many residents across the province who have indicated that it is imperative they have access to high-speed Internet and improved digital cellular coverage. I know many of my colleagues on both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker, who have heard them as well.

We've been listening, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure of joining the Premier and Robert Watson, president and CEO [chief executive officer] of SaskTel, for this historic announcement, Mr. Speaker. Within three years, 100 per cent of Saskatchewan residents will have access to SaskTel high-speed Internet service.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — A historic announcement indeed for the people of Saskatchewan, for SaskTel, and for this government, Mr. Speaker. We have also announced that SaskTel digital cellular coverage will expand to 98 per cent of the population in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, in order to achieve these goals, the Government of Saskatchewan is providing \$90 million in funding to SaskTel to complete a three-year, \$129 million infrastructure program — quite a commitment to the Crown corporations of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of this investment, SaskTel will undertake the following infrastructure programs over the next three years. SaskTel will upgrade the underlying backbone infrastructure to create an enhanced transport network to provide basic high-speed Internet access to 187 communities. SaskTel will also expand the existing community network by doubling the speeds to institutions and adding approximately 90 new communities to the existing 256.

Mr. Speaker, there will also be an expansion of the last mile rural broadband infrastructure, using fixed wireless and satellite technology, to achieve 100 per cent coverage across the province, Mr. Speaker. And SaskTel will improve cellular coverage by adding approximately 50 new digital cellular sites across the province, Mr. Speaker.

With this investment in Saskatchewan, SaskTel will provide residents with one of the best communications systems in the world. This historic investment aligns very well with the new Saskatchewan-first policy, Mr. Speaker. We're investing in our

own province to provide residents of Saskatchewan with the latest in communication technology.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I thank SaskTel management and staff, past and present, for building a world-class network that we enjoy in this province today. I have full confidence that SaskTel employees will rise to this new challenge and build an even better network that will help us deliver continued prosperity and a better life for people in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first words are thanks to the minister for sharing his ministerial statement prior to question period with me. I appreciate that. My second words are thanks to the president of SaskTel, Robert Watson, for his kind words about the New Democrats' involvement in setting this up. My next words are thanks to the minister and the Premier who both reiterated exactly that same thing, and I appreciate their acknowledgment that this is a continuation of a program initiative that was started under New Democrats, and they were both very generous in that. I thank them for that.

I want to not least of all thank the good people that work at SaskTel, the people that actually make this happen and have built the sweetest little telco in the universe right here in Saskatchewan. And of course all the hard-working staff at SaskTel deserve our thanks and our praise.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good public policy decision, and it further cements Saskatchewan's reputation as a leader in the telecommunications and technology delivery areas. The work that was undertaken by the NDP and now the expansion of that work by the Sask Party is in fact good news for investors, for small businesses, and people wishing to make Saskatchewan home, whether they're in our urban or our rural areas, Mr. Speaker. This announcement underscores the value of our publicly owned Crown corporations and the critical role they play in providing the needed services, particularly in rural and northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'll close where I entered. I want to thank the minister, the Premier, SaskTel for this good news announcement that was made yesterday and then the ministerial statement today. It is in fact good news for all of Saskatchewan, and congratulations. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 74 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (English) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 74, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (English) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Justice has moved that Bill No. 74, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (English) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Bill No. 75 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Bilingual) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008/Loi corrective (lois bilingues) de 2008*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 75, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Bilingual) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Justice has moved that Bill No. 75, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Bilingual) Amendment and Repeal Act, 2008* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 76 — *The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2008 (No. 2)*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 76, *The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2008* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment has moved that Bill No. 76, *The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2008 (No. 2)* now be read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

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

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 603 — *The Reporting of Federal Transfers Act*

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 603, *The Reporting of Federal Transfers Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Douglas Park has moved that Bill No. 603, *The Reporting of Federal Transfers Act* be now read the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — With leave later this day, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — No.

The Speaker: — Leave is not granted. Leave is not granted.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I lay on the Table the *Business and Financial Plan* of the Provincial Auditor.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the answer to question 132.

The Speaker: — Answers to question 132 tabled.

[11:00]

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Yorkton.

Government Initiatives

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of my remarks I will be making a motion:

That this Assembly recognize the many initiatives undertaken by the Government of Saskatchewan which ensure that all Saskatchewan people, including our most vulnerable, benefit from our new-found prosperity.

To talk about this, Mr. Speaker, I have to go back a little bit in time. I'll be focusing most of my comments on one initiative that's taken up a huge part of my life in the last year, as my beautiful wife and daughters could attest to. And that's speaking about the community-based organization regional gatherings that we ended up having over the last two weeks in September.

And to tell that story, Mr. Speaker, we have to go back to mid-October of '06 when I, as a nominated candidate, we had a caucus meeting in Yorkton. And what we agreed to do is to have a lunch with a group of people in Yorkton. And what we decided to do was have a lunch with the community-based organization sector from Yorkton.

And through that luncheon, Mr. Speaker, some very interesting things happened. The way it all folded out, we ended up having 12 or 14 CBO [community-based organizations] representatives and other employees come to that luncheon. And we ended up doing . . . I did a little bit of an opening remark and the Premier — now Premier, then leader of the opposition — did some opening remarks. And after the luncheon we invited all the attendees of the luncheon to get up, state their name, state the name of their CBO, the disciplines that they serve, and maybe some challenges that they may have.

Well, Mr. Speaker, at the end of that portion, the leader of the opposition then, our now Premier, again stood up and recognized every person, remembered their name, remembered their CBO name, remembered the discipline, and addressed the challenges and offered solutions.

And, Mr. Speaker, after that meeting I had a very encouraging conversation with I would call the leader of the community-based organizations' secretary in Yorkton. And his comments to me I found quite startling. He told me that he was so encouraged by what he had witnessed that afternoon because in his years and years — in fact decades, Mr. Speaker — in that background, he had never been paid much attention by, never mind the opposition but the government of the day as well, Mr. Speaker. And I found that quite startling. As the government of the day, the members across sort of waved the banner and the flag of being there for looking after the most vulnerable and the needy in society.

One thing we recognized from the community-based organization, Mr. Speaker, is that . . . Let's look at first the reasons they exist. Well if we look at the reasons the CBO exists, Mr. Speaker, usually there's a need identified in the community. And you get a group of people with a heart for that need, a heart for the community. They step forward. They develop a program. You know, they might access some government funding. They might access community funding,

and they'll serve that need and fill that purpose.

And the reason they're so good, Mr. Speaker, is they're very efficient, and they're very effective. And we as a government, we realize no government can really do it alone. The job is just too large. You have people on the front lines that have a heart for that type of work. They have a heart for the different issues. Many are involved with those issues in their personal lives. They might have a disabled child. They might have, like in our case, we had a child with cancer, where we get involved with the Cancer Society . . . many different people that are involved for the reasons that they should be involved, Mr. Speaker.

So you have a very efficient, effective group of people that have a real interest in what they're doing — not a government department that does it just because it's a job. And government, Mr. Speaker, by nature, is slow to react, not nearly as efficient. And one quote I'll steal from our Premier that I thought was quite profound, a statement he said over the past few months, Mr. Speaker, in fact during the summit process was:

We've got to realize that the CBO sector does a lot of the heavy lifting in the province when it comes to human service delivery. It is staffed by 6,000 heroes that show up every day.

Well, Mr. Speaker, one comment that happened after relaying those comments of that initial, what I would call the initial CBO gathering in Yorkton was that I relayed these comments to the leader of the opposition, the now Premier. And he said, you know, in opposition it's very difficult to get things through. You can advocate and advocate, but the government of the day has to accept that place that you're trying to get to. But if we should ever form government, he said to me, we will have to look at this more in-depth. We'll have to do this on a grander scale and really listen to the concerns of these front-line workers and help them help us, Mr. Speaker.

Well we were successful in the election, and I consider the Premier's first promise carried out was that very promise that he made or that commitment he made to me, in fact, October 11, 2006. He contacted me shortly after the election, asked me to assume the duties as Legislative Secretary to the Hon. Minister of Social Services from Humboldt. He asked me to aid her engaging the CBO sector in a more positive manner than they've been accustomed to in the past, to foster positive working relationship.

He requested a CBO summit of human service delivery stakeholders to get feedback, identify their challenges, possibly offer solutions, and ask them for solutions. We could work towards supporting them in their work, so we could help them, as I said, Mr. Speaker, help us to deliver the important services to the people of the province, their clients being among the most vulnerable that we have in our society.

A lot of naysayers said they thought it couldn't be done, much too difficult, much too big a job. How do you facilitate hundreds if not possibly 1,000 people? It was a large job to organize this undertaking, Mr. Speaker, to say the least. Our initial thing that we had to do was identify who we're talking about. We were talking about hundreds? We were talking about thousands? We identified, Mr. Speaker, well over 1,000 specific

human service delivery CBOs in the province.

We developed a database with the help of a legislative intern, did a lot of work, and over time the ministry took over and kept adding to the names and the data on that database. And a lot of help from others involved the former member from Saskatoon Northwest, Ted Merriman. The former minister of Social Services under the NDP approximately a decade back, Mr. Bob Pringle, was brought on for his input, knowing from decades back — for years back — the challenges that Social Services faced, the CBO sector faced. And Mr. Pringle, now being in the CBO sector, had a lot to offer.

The staff was unbelievably supportive, Mr. Speaker, and worked hard. The minister's chief of staff, an amazing amount of work that he undertook. He covered my back on numerous situations. The MAs [ministerial assistant] in her office, others involved through the ministry, and the organization of the project was unbelievable.

We brought on a facilitator by the name of Bob Chartier, with an open-space concept, where we soon realized that one large summit wasn't going to be very doable. It was very hard to undertake, hard to facilitate. But if we were to do five regional gatherings, we'd downplay or lower the costs of this summit. We would be more effective. We'd have more engaged conversation and address more of the concerns, have a lot more time for the people involved to speak. The five regional gatherings we decided on was in the five social service regions of the province: Saskatoon, Regina, North Battleford, Prince Albert, and Yorkton. And, Mr. Speaker, I was very happy to have the summit process end in Yorkton being, as I believe, it was the birthplace of the start of the whole CBO summit process.

One thing, we got comments from a lot of the members involved, attending the summits. They were very excited and to this day still talk about the fact that the Minister of Social Services not only ended up attending for a portion of the day each day of the summits, but spent the majority of her day at the summits engaged with the attendees unless otherwise took away for meetings relating to the summits.

The Premier as well, he attended in Yorkton, and I say the birthplace of the summit process as I see it. The Premier, it worked out that he was able to attend in Yorkton, although I have one bone of contention with the Premier at this Yorkton summit, Mr. Speaker. When I compared my opening remark notes with what he was going to present, I thought we were all on board, but as he spoke to the people at the summits, he pretty much destroyed my speaking notes. I had to cross off, cross off, cross off, and before I was done, it was a pretty minimal opening. But personally I'd rather listen to the Premier speak as to myself.

Through this process, Mr. Speaker, the Premier, and the Minister of Social Services laid the groundwork and the foundation for a lot of the work that has been done to date. Although the process was led by the Minister of Social Services, it represented all ministries involved with human service delivery in the province.

In our budget in the spring, we announced a 2.3 per cent

increase to support the CBO sector. And granted this wasn't enough to aid all the issues at the time, Mr. Speaker, but it was what we could do at the time, a promise we could live up to and commit to and carry through with. Shortly after, in September, to go into effect October 1, was a 7 per cent lift to the CBO sector of the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, surprisingly enough, you know, granted there is still issues with funding and wages in the CBO sector, and I did hear some negative comments about this announcement concerning the political timing which, you know, granted you could argue that, I suppose. But I thought, you know, it's quite strange when you consider it. If you want to analyze the political timing of an event like that, my personal view is I think we'd have been better off holding off on that timing. Let's just hold off on that announcement of money. Let's just keep it in the bank, and we'll wait until, we'll wait until, you know, we have the summit process over with. We'll let this one item overshadow the whole CBO summits. And when the summits are over, we'll come out. We'll announce this funding, and we'll pat ourselves on the back. We'll look like political geniuses and move on.

But, Mr. Speaker, that would defeat the whole purpose of the summits. That would overshadow the summit process. We would have had a lot of the really important issues other than the funding go unnoticed. So, Mr. Speaker, we thought better to go ahead of time, get this out of the way. We won't let this one subject overshadow the summits. We can get to the grassroots, some of the other issues that are affecting the CBOs that weren't normally identified. We wanted to be proactive and reactive. And as I said, we didn't want to let this one thing overshadow all of our summits, Mr. Speaker.

And the open space format was questioned and how effective would that be, coming to this type of a thing without an agenda. I had a lot of doubters saying what's this going to be, like an open space thing. You're going to come with a three-piece suit, do a PowerPoint — this is what we're going to do — thanks for coming out and not much consultation. But when I relayed to the attendees that what we need is for you to come with what you know, your experience, we're going to develop the format. We're going to develop the agenda from the ground. We're going to talk about what you want to talk about, Mr. Speaker. We're going to talk about your issues. We're going to address your challenges, and we're going to move forward with your input, which I would say, Mr. Speaker, is a true, true consultation process.

And I would gauge the reactions, Mr. Speaker, of these summits by one person, a very respected member of the Yorkton CBO community. He came up to me after the last Yorkton summit — he had got the feedback from a few of them — and he said, you know, Greg, coming into this thing I had some very high expectations. So, Mr. Speaker, I was waiting for the other shoe to drop and I said, well how do you think we did? His answer to me — Greg, you guys have far surpassed my expectations. And, Mr. Speaker, that's one person from the CBO community that I would take the word over most other people involved in this, especially the members opposite.

And I know we're setting the bar high. We are setting some fairly lofty goals. But if we come up short for some reason, Mr.

Speaker, we can analyze, we can learn, we can adjust, and we can move forward. We've got to set targets. We've got to set our targets. We know where we're coming up short. We can adjust, we can move forward and keep continuing to help those community-based organizations in the province.

I'm just going to touch on a few of the things briefly, Mr. Speaker, that we have accomplished in the short time, some of them directly related to the CBO summits. We now see that we have a lot of measures to assist low-income family and people. The 2008 tax credit will not affect their income tax credits. They will not be clawed back. Tax credit will be excluded from the calculation for social assistance benefits. Mileage rate under the Saskatchewan assistance plan will be increased 5 cents per kilometre and will increase with the price of fuel. Increases for basic monthly home heating fees, actual utility costs to be paid on monthly billings.

Thirty thousand dollars in the way of a contact information site with the United Way of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Food Bank for people around the province to access these very important services. Money going towards shortening or eliminating 440-person wait-list for residential day and specialized programs. \$27.8 million to go towards projects for capital funding projects. A new income assistance plan that will specifically give money to social assistance recipients that will not get off social assistance, that are disabled, some dignity, Mr. Speaker.

I have pages and pages here that I'm just not going to get to at this time, Mr. Speaker. So as my time is coming to a close, I want to allow my colleagues from both sides of the House to comment on all the positive initiatives undertaken by our government. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly recognize the numerous initiatives undertaken by the Government of Saskatchewan which ensure that all Saskatchewan people, including the province's most vulnerable, benefit from our new-found prosperity.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[11:15]

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member from Yorkton:

That this Assembly recognize the numerous initiatives undertaken by the Government of Saskatchewan which ensure that all Saskatchewan people, including the province's most vulnerable, benefit from our new-found prosperity.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to speak on this motion. It's an important one as the government puts forth its plan. Of course we've listened to the Throne Speech and over the past several weeks we've seen

what their initiatives are. And there are several, and we definitely have some questions about them.

Before I get into my formal comments, I do want to make some comments about the first speaker's remarks about the CBO summit. He was the Legislative Secretary for that, and I was able to attend all of them, and I thought that they were well designed.

But there were some questions. And of course we want to make sure the record is correct on this because the feeling may have been out there that if this was the first time the CBOs ever got together, it's not quite the case at all. In fact for several years there was a voluntary sector initiative. In fact that was a national initiative, not just one that was happening in Saskatchewan. Again where there is an issue of rebranding and rewriting history, the voluntary sector initiative was a very successful initiative of getting groups together right across this province who were involved in making Saskatchewan what it is.

One record or one initiative that was very well received by the CBO sector was our work around board liability that we had passed a few years ago — very, very important. And I appreciate the comments of the member talking about the announcement of increased funding which happened the week before and the questions around the timing of that. And they clearly left the impression with many of the workers, if not all the workers, that they were going to be seeing significant wage increases. And we understand that's not the case, that it's really left up to the individual CBO, and they may or may not be getting what they truly deserve.

And one of the points that I heard clearly over and over again was the question around vision, the lack of vision, any kind of strategy, any kind of overarching world view from this government about how they would think the CBOs should serve this province. It seems to be an ad hoc thing.

I appreciate the database the member talks about, and I'm wondering if he's going to be sharing it through the 211 initiative they're talking about.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when I was preparing for this I was struck by the resolution that "... most vulnerable, benefit from our new-found prosperity." It reminds me of a cartoon that I saw in *The StarPhoenix* this summer. And it's sort of the like the old classic ransom note and different letters cut out, and it says, Dear Tenant: We're doubling your rent. Send more money. Meet our demands or else. We know where you live.

Well it would be funny except the case is it's so, so true for many people in Saskatchewan. And this is the fact of the matter. People are facing difficult times in the months coming, and so we have to disagree with this resolution quite forcefully. People are concerned about how, in the case of having boom times here, some people are being left behind.

I want to share a couple of letters and some quotes from people in my riding, but I've got letters from Regina, across the province, and in fact we heard about Estevan this past week, the pressures that are being faced there.

Here's somebody who writes that they just received notice "... my rent is to go from \$730.00 to \$960.00 a month on February 1, 2009. On February 1, 2008 my rent went from \$610.00 to \$730.00." She goes on to say:

They said our rent increase would be comparable to similar apartments in our area. We have no exercise or party room and my rent is now higher than a one bedroom suite in an apartment, a block away, that has both an exercise and a party room. Some thanks after residing here for 30 years.

I also received another note. This one was on October 31. And it says, and I quote:

When I moved in, March 1997, my rent was \$477 a month. In ten years, my rent had increased ... slightly more than \$100 a month. However, January 2007, my monthly rent jumped over \$100 to \$690, which is what it is now. According to the notice I received this week, my monthly rent will be \$960, which is a \$270 or 39% increase from what it is today. Suffice to say my wages have certainly not followed that trend.

Furthermore [she goes on to say], I find it ironic, the notice of rental increase arrived the same day Brad Wall sent out a mailing saying how wonderful life is in Saskatchewan. In view of the current lack of affordable housing, I'm seriously considering leaving this province.

Perhaps this gargantuan rent increase is part of the new owner's latest tactic to empty out the building to move forward with the condo conversion.

She goes on to say that she asked me to raise this in the legislature.

Well, Mr. Speaker, who are all these Saskatchewan people? We know there are seniors who are facing issues on fixed income, housing, and energy. We know those are people who are living with disabilities, dealing with issues, particularly around access. We've heard issues around paratransit, families face issues around daycare, and we'll be speaking more about that.

Students are facing issues around tuition — that's a huge issue. Aboriginal people face a whole host of challenges, including child care, training, housing, and that type of thing. And one I find particularly interesting is the emerging immigrant community, some of the challenges that they're facing. They've been promised an awful lot in this province, and they're not feeling the same benefits that many others are.

But what are the common threads through this whole discussion, Mr. Speaker? Well I think there are three: energy, food, and housing. These are the three that people are feeling significant challenges in months ahead as we come into the second winter of this Sask Party government.

Of course within energy, we see SaskEnergy raising their bills some 27 per cent. Our government, when we were in power, had a bundle that guaranteed the lowest rate, the lowest utilities in Canada. They thought that was a gimmick but I tell you, Mr. Speaker, it affected everyone.

Food. What about food? Here we saw a mean-spirited government here in the core communities of Saskatoon, yank the funding for Station 20 West, the Good Food Junction. Here is something that they could point to and say, we're doing something. Well they certainly proved . . . I'll point it as something that they didn't do, and people are very, very concerned.

And, Mr. Speaker, in this House I've been raising daily the issue around seniors and affordable housing. People have been raising the issue around students and the housing in the North and this government has been pretty quiet about that. Not any new money, any new money in any kind of building new affordable housing in Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the research is clear. Mr. Speaker, the research is clear and I have quite a bundle here. This is the research around poverty in Saskatchewan. These reports have come out in the last six months. We have the report, *A Question of Prosperity: Poverty in Saskatchewan* came out in June.

Here's an interesting one that I think the members opposite would find very interesting. This is called, *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*. It came out of the Senate. And who are one of the main co-authors? The Hon. Leonard J. Gustafson. Many of these people would know that gentleman.

And what are some of the issues? Well one of the first ones is developing a national poverty reduction strategy. And of course, Mr. Speaker, we've heard about the health disparity report that came out. We've heard, as well, about the *Campaign 2000* report that came out last week. And just yesterday, the report that came out from the *HungerCount 2008* on Tuesday, November 25.

And I am alarmed by this, Mr. Speaker. It talks about Saskatchewan continues to have one of the highest percentages of child food bank clients. One of the most startling things is that the primary . . . And this is new. There's been a significant increase in the number of households reporting employment as a primary source of income, with an increase from 7 per cent in 2007 to 12 per cent in 2008. That's almost doubling, Mr. Speaker.

Well clearly what we need is an anti-poverty strategy. This government has done several ad hoc programs but nothing like a strategy or a vision to eliminate poverty in this province. The time is now. They have the resources. And that is the reason I cannot support this resolution, Mr. Speaker. It is seriously deficient in terms of asking for a vision of how we're going to solve these challenges in our communities right across this province. The time is now, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask all members to defeat this resolution. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to rise in the House today and speak in support of this motion. But first I would like to congratulate the member from Yorkton for the hard work he did in organizing,

along with the Minister of Social Services, the CBO summit.

It has often been said, Mr. Speaker, that a society can be judged on how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members. It is important for our government to take the necessary actions and steps to ensure that no one is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, in the year since the Saskatchewan Party was chosen by the people of our province to form a government, we have seen historic growth. Saskatchewan is leading the country in economic and population growth. We are enjoying unprecedented prosperity. Demand for our natural resources is at an all-time high, which has resulted in record revenues. Mr. Speaker, we are a shining jewel afloat in the sea of economic uncertainty that is washing over other provinces and nations.

So far the strength of Saskatchewan's economy has shielded us from the turbulence being experienced by many others. Now that is not to say that we do not face our own unique challenges such as the rising cost of living. In a growth economy such as ours, prices for many things such as gas, groceries, rent, and mortgage payments, they are increasing. And for many of the people, these costs are just about unmanageable. For others, it is difficult. They present a serious challenge.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the benefits of our new-found prosperity will be shared by all Saskatchewan residents including our most vulnerable. It is important that low-income individuals and families, disabled persons, seniors, and children, to name just a few, receive the assistance they may need.

I would like to speak this morning, Mr. Speaker, about some of the initiatives undertaken by our government to ensure that no one gets left behind. Affordable housing is a serious challenge for some of our Saskatchewan residents. Now shelter is a basic human right, and it is an issue this government takes very, very seriously. And to that end, we established the task force on housing affordability, Chaired by a former Saskatchewan Party MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly], and a former NDP Social Service minister.

This task force made several recommendations, many of which our government is quickly implementing. Our government has increased the shelter allowance for social assistance recipients and indexed it to the cost of living. The increase in shelter allowance under Saskatchewan assistance program and transitional employment allowance were in response to rising cost in the average market rent.

We are providing further protection for renters through amendments to *The Residential Tenancies Act* which will require landlords to provide six-months notice prior to a rent increase on month-to-month rental accommodations. We have taken steps to ensure that communities are accurately categorized for purposes of establishing social assistance shelter allowances and, accordingly, rates.

The income threshold for seniors who qualify for social housing has also been increased. As part of the largest ever single-year income tax, our government has dramatically reduced income taxes for the lowest to the moderate-income earners. The number of emergency shelter and transitional spaces has been

increased right across this province. We are working with post-secondary institutions to increase the supply of student housing on or near post-secondary campuses.

Our government has committed to incorporating best practices and innovative ideas and design models when creating affordable housing for seniors and individuals with special needs. We are also taking steps to ensure energy-efficient building practices are incorporated into new or existing affordable housing units. We are paying attention.

Our government is working with the federal government to ensure a new affordable housing agreement. In recent weeks we announced a change to the governance structure of the Saskatchewan Housing Corp to a board comprised of housing stakeholders across the province, including representatives from the municipalities.

[11:30]

For the past 16 years, Saskatchewan has trailed most every other province and territory in the level of financial support provided to our seniors. Now our government, it's committed to supporting the people who built this province and have taken steps to address this inequity. For the first time since 1992, benefits under the seniors' income plan are increasing. This 19.5 million initiative will raise the maximum monthly seniors' income plan benefit from 90 to \$190 for single seniors, and from \$72.50 to \$155 for each member of a two-pensioner household.

The number of eligible seniors will also more than double from 10 to 20,000. Now that increase returns the programs to 1992 levels, the time of the last increase, which amounted to only \$10 a month. Seniors are some of our society's most vulnerable.

So too are many of our children, and they are what we consider our most precious resource. Our government is also taking steps to ensure our children and grandchildren receive the support they need.

Our government recently announced tax cuts that will have a major impact on low- to moderate-income families. The \$4,000 increase to the basic personal and spousal exemptions has the potential to either save them thousands of dollars or remove them from the tax roles altogether. The child tax credit has also increased by \$2,000.

A new low-income tax credit replaces the, increases the Saskatchewan sales tax credit. Recipients of social assistance programs will be able to keep any of the 2008 tax refunds that is generated by the historic tax cuts that we announced earlier this fall.

The 2008 income tax refunds and tax credits received through the Saskatchewan low-income tax credit will also be excluded.

Parents receiving social assistance now have access to new parent support workshops from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. Community-based organizations, including agencies that help families, receive a funding increase of 7 per cent annualized to help with salaries and operational costs. Our government has made the largest

ever increase in Saskatchewan's employment supplement maximum benefit levels. Income cut-off levels have also been increased. We introduced a new children's drug plan to ensure that families pay only \$15 for drugs listed on the Saskatchewan formulary and those approved under the exceptional drug status.

Beginning in 2009 tax year, the active family benefit will help families with the cost of extracurricular activities for our children. Our government provided new funding for school lunch and anti-hunger programs in our community schools. The child care subsidy program received funding for 500 new spaces announced in the 2008 and 2009 budget.

Now our government is maintaining its commitment to fund 267 million in child care, in early childhood initiatives, over four years. In order to meet the demands of a growing province, we've provided 1.7 million in new funding for 500 additional child care spaces. There are now more than 10,000 licensed spaces in this province.

An early learning enrolment grant averaging \$10,000 per centre was provided to all child centres in March 2008. Now this grant will also be available to new centres and spaces, 2008 and 2009. One point seven million was provided to child care centres in April 2008 to support an average of 4 per cent wage lift for every childhood education. Our government is committed an additional 2 million in funding for pre-kindergarten program, bringing the total investments to 9.6 million.

Mr. Speaker, I'm committing today to people of Saskatchewan, this government will continue to listen. We will continue to take action to help the most vulnerable in our province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be able to stand and make comments on the motion that was put forward, addressing how the most vulnerable in our society benefit from the new-found prosperity within the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that outcomes and future success of our citizens and our families can be directly impacted by some of the conditions that we experience in our lives, whether that's something as basic as nutrition. Children need proper nutrition so they can learn better in school. I mean we can put forward many different research papers that will put credence into the comments that I'm making.

Also housing: if young children and families have a stable housing situation, you will also see improved outcomes in the education of that child, of the behaviour, and it will ripple through society. We will see less instance of acting out and all kinds of behaviours that will result from that, but from the instability in their home life.

When we talk about outcomes and we talk about that so important, ever so important early beginning in life, the thing that really rings true for me is that these youngest citizens of

our lives truly do need us to take the responsibility to provide the best circumstances possible for them to succeed to have that important good start.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can always remember reading a book when I was a young mom and my kids were little. My sister actually passed it along to me, and it was called *Children: The Challenge*. And while it went through kind of the expectations of changes in our children, and what we could expect to see over a number of years till they hit their early teens, one thing was always stuck with me, that from zero to three, zero to five in some research, the basic personality of our children will be established by what influences them during that time, what influences are available to them at that time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this used to be a big source of support for me when I was going through those teen years, and my daughters were having troubles, as teens always do. And I used to think, oh my goodness. I hope I did something right from zero to five or zero to three, that they would grow out of this, and that they would have those good basics that you need to be successful throughout your life.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we think of those in our province and those in our communities that are struggling, for me one of the simplest and clearest paths that we need to take is to make sure there is child care spaces and facilities, not just in the large urban centres but also in smaller urbans, in rural communities, where these are also very important, and in the North. Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the whole province and make sure that those services are there for our littlest of citizens and our most important. They may be the smallest, but they're also I think the most important. And when we look at, well what's the things that need to be done? And people will talk about creating child care spaces.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've stood in the House and made those comments also. But I also understand that there's a great deal more that goes into it than just creating a space. There also has to be the proper early childhood educators that are there in the facility to be able to run programs for the children to make sure they are getting some of those very early but good influences. We see many demands on families where both parents, or if it's in the case of a single parent, there's a need to enter the workforce. We've heard many comments about the labour force shortage across Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has one of the highest attachments of women with children five and under, the highest attachment of that group to the workforce. So where do their children go? What kind of care are they getting? And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, when your children are in good care, stable care, and you are comfortable with the arrangements you've made, you're also a much better employee. You're more comfortable when you're at work. It's not a constant worry about where are my children, what are the kids doing today? So, Mr. Speaker, it goes much broader. But really for those littlest of citizens in our province, we need to make sure that there are adequate, affordable child care spaces available across the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that in our last year of government, the former government, we put in place a broad program that addressed a number of areas to make child care successful. We

know that's it's not, as I said, as easy as just creating spaces. But we need to also look at the depth of the subsidy and the cost and the affordability. There's also issues with recruitment and retention of workers. And there's also things as basic as nutrition grants, with the rising cost of food; also parenting supports, and some very basic issues. With today's increase in the real estate market, we also need to be sure that there is capital investment for child care facilities and pre-kindergarten facilities.

Mr. Speaker, while it is an area that we need to really address, I'm afraid that it always or often gets pushed to the background, that it isn't put as a priority. It isn't given the level of support and the level of prioritization that it truly needs. Because we can talk . . . These little folks, they're the ones that are going to be impacting our society quite quickly, and we need to make sure that they are a priority from the early days right through until they are contributing members of our society.

And I keep questioning, what are we seeing right now? In our last year of government, Mr. Speaker, we introduced 1,040 child care spaces across the province. And since that time, since that 1,040 of the last year of . . . Now the member opposite's howling. You know, if she wants to get up and join in the debate, I wish she would. But she is inaccurate, the comments that she's making. In the last year of our government, and the paperwork is there, there was 1,040 child care spaces established in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's a small step, but it's a big step for making sure that resources are there. So now we see this new government, huge amounts of surplus cash at the ready but no focus and no dedication to increase child care in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget they stood in this House and committed to 500 new child care spaces across the province, but how many have they initiated? How many of those 500 have been put in place? Five hundred? No. Four hundred? No. One hundred? No. They committed to 500, but there has been zero. Zero of those child care spaces have been actually put in place and up and running. In fact this is so slow and there is so little focus on those youngest and most vulnerable in our community that they re-announced it in October in the Speech from the Throne. Now they twisted it a wee bit. In the budget they talked about 500 spaces. In the Throne Speech, focusing on next year, they talked about \$1.7 million being put in place for our youngest and most vulnerable of citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of a shell game. And I truly hope that with the needs that are out there, we look at the disparity in conditions between those that are living a more comfortable life to those that are struggling in our province. They are being left behind in a number of areas: housing, education, health care — you can look at a number.

Now one of the members opposite says, 80,000 off the tax roll. Well you can look at various research, and there was comments in the paper not that long ago. If you are low-income, tax credits do not help you if the money isn't there. Now the member scoffs at it, but he really needs to do some reading and do some background.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many areas where we could improve the lives of those most vulnerable. And it's not by cutting low-cost programs like the dental sealant program that was done when they first came to power. And it's not like cutting a benefits program for vulnerable low-income workers.

Mr. Speaker, they need to take a good look at the programs and, in many cases, low-cost programs that can truly have an impact and make a difference for those most vulnerable in Saskatchewan's society.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[11:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honour to speak to the motion before us today to address how all of the people of this province will benefit from our new-found prosperity.

It is of special interest to me as I have experienced, as you're aware, an impoverished and de-franchised youth. I later went on and have a degree in Social Work and sociology, and have worked with people across this nation suffering addictions.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, it was not until I had the privilege and the honour of being elected as a member of the Saskatchewan Party government that I had the opportunity to see policies and programs be developed that actually addressed the issues experienced by the most vulnerable people in our province.

Mr. Speaker, during this past year I have served as a member of the government caucus Standing Policy Committee on Human Services. This committee is assigned to such policy areas as health, education, corrections, and social services. In the past nine months, we have met with over 45 stakeholder groups in Regina, Saskatoon, North Battleford, and Prince Albert. We have travelled to tour their facilities and actively engaged in discussion with their program organizers right on their sites. It has been the committee's vision and its goal to hold positive and productive stakeholder meetings that are mutually benefit to everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, we have encouraged groups to set aside any flowery rhetoric and be as open and as direct with us regarding their concerns as they feel comfortable. We have asked them what they view as barriers and what they foresee as possible solutions. We have talked, debated, and discussed — with each of the groups — key priorities and have more importantly listened to their concerns. The committee has empathized and at times given stakeholder hugs after they have shared with us some of their very difficult and personal stories and experiences.

Mr. Speaker, these are real groups representing real people who are in real crisis. This type of vulnerability knows no political barriers. It is part of the human condition, and this government has addressed this by providing a real, human response. This response is to assure that everyone in the province of

Saskatchewan shares in the current prosperity regardless of their income level or social situation. This current government did not just talk about ideas. They made a firm commitment to the people of Saskatchewan and have taken numerous steps to fulfill this promise.

Before I share some of this government actions, I would like to address the claim by the opposition that this government neglects Saskatchewan's most vulnerable and poor.

Mr. Speaker, it is only fair that we first look at the NDP's history and chronic neglect of social services in this province. There has been no increase in shelter rates in 15 years, no increase in the general living allowance for food and clothes for over a decade. There were 440 people with disabilities on the wait-list to receive necessary residential or day programming services. In 1992 people with disabilities did not have to wait for services because no wait-lists existed. No increase in the Saskatchewan Income Plan since 1992. There was inadequate support for foster homes and other supports for children in the care of ministries.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the opposition needs to be reminded that the '40s and '50s are over. Tommy Douglas is no longer the leader of their party, and if he was, it would be fair to say he would be shocked and appalled at their social policies and track record.

Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP list on their website only 17 points on how they made life more affordable for people in this province and how everybody benefited from their strong economy during the 16 years that the NDP were in power. Yes, Mr. Speaker, only 17 points — accounting for 16 years — of which two points are having the lowest car insurance rates in Canada and designating a new statutory holiday in February. Mr. Speaker, not everyone even has the means or the ability to own a car in this province in order to benefit from that program, and a new statutory holiday only benefits those who had jobs.

Mr. Speaker, to really understand how out of touch the former government was in regarding social issues, it may be helpful to revisit August 2007 when it was reported in *The StarPhoenix* that the former government felt it was prepared for the housing boom that people would benefit from. The former government then discovered a housing crisis in Saskatoon and reported that the shelter rate would increase \$5 and the rental housing supplement would increase \$6 to address this concern. Yes, 5 and \$6, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP even publicly recognized that this would not help some of the renters who were facing over \$100-a-month-rent increases. It is a terrible thing in this world to encourage false hope in others. This unethical treatment by the former NDP government towards the vulnerable people of this province is appalling.

While it's very difficult for governments to legislate ethics and morality, they can, however, choose to act. The Saskatchewan government has in fact acted with respect and empathy and understanding and a commitment to solve problems. During the last election, Mr. Speaker, the Premier often mentioned that hope beats fear. Since the Saskatchewan government was elected last November, we have invested 1.1 million for transition houses and sexual assault centres to strengthen

services to women who are victims of domestic violence.

We purchased two homes in Saskatoon through Egadz that provided vulnerable youth stable and supportive places to live. Increase in Saskatchewan employment supplement to help low-to moderate-income working families with the cost of raising families. Increase to child subsidy to ensure that licensed child care is affordable for Saskatchewan parents. Provided \$500,000 for school lunch and anti-hunger programs in community schools. Provided \$400,000 to process 320 000 kilograms of pork that was donated to food banks across the province. Created and quickly responded to, through the task force in housing affordability, to ensure affordable housing to keep pace with the province's economic momentum.

Developed the new primary health bus to provide health care to inner-city residents, those with the greatest barriers to accessing care. Increased shelter allowance and rental housing supplements to adjust to both the average mark of rental rates, helping Saskatchewan families deal with the growing cost of living. Increased income thresholds for seniors to qualify for social housing programs up by 19 per cent.

Increased per diem rates to CBOs operating in emergency shelters, immediately benefiting those in crisis with an increase of 60 per cent for individuals and 20 per cent for families. Committed 2.4 million in Regina to Harbour House furthering our commitment to help those who are homeless and at risk by providing safe and secure and affordable housing.

Eliminated 440 on the waiting list for people with mental disabilities. Introduced the children's drug plan. Implemented new case management system to ensure the safety of children in care. Implemented PRIDE training and foster care programming, including First Nations and Métis, with a component to strengthen the caregiving system that currently exists that will meet the many needs of our children.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much to go on about what this government has done in such a short period of time compared to the rhetoric of 16 years from the opposition.

As an MLA from Saskatoon, it's important to me that investments were made and are made in the core neighbourhoods. We announced 16.3 million for two projects in the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood in Saskatoon alone: 8.3 million dedicated to build a new St. Mary Community School, daycare and wellness centre; the second project for an allocation of \$8 million towards the development of affordable housing with local community groups.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the opposition constantly goes on, well we didn't have the money. Well they had enough money to grow government by 30 per cent to the largest level of government in this country. They had enough money to invest millions of dollars outside of this province — hundreds — and lose hundreds of dollars. They had enough money to invest in SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company] and lose millions of dollars, but they didn't have enough money to invest in our children and the most vulnerable in our society.

Mr. Speaker, I support this motion as the most comprehensive

attack on child poverty in this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to join in on the debate today, Mr. Speaker, on the motion that was put forward by the government side. A pleasure, Mr. Speaker, not because I agree with this motion, not because I think that this motion hits the mark, but rather the opposite, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this motion does not accurately reflect what has been occurring in this province over the past year of this Sask Party government.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of affordability, there are certainly, Mr. Speaker, items where this government over this past year, when they've been carrying on the tradition of what has been occurring over the past years, areas where they have gotten things right. I will grant them that, Mr. Speaker. But there are many areas, many areas, Mr. Speaker, where they've missed the mark, many areas, Mr. Speaker, where they're dropping the ball, many areas where they're failing to realize what the immediate needs are for Saskatchewan people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, preceding me, from the opposition side, we heard from the member from Saskatoon Centre who went on for some . . . very well went on speaking about the housing needs. We also heard from the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow discussing child care needs, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get into my comments, I do want to make a few introductory comments. It was interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, to see the scripted speeches by the members opposite, from the three government backbenchers on that side, Mr. Speaker. The scripted speeches, very unlike some of the members there, and I'm curious as to why these messages were so scripted. I can just imagine the three members, perhaps the member from Northwest saying to the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, saying to the other member from Yorkton, come on into the boardroom. And I think they spent the night with scissors and glue and they went through the stack of Sask Party news releases, Mr. Speaker. They cut out these news releases, pasted them together, and decided that's what we're saying tomorrow in the legislature, Mr. Speaker.

And I think that instruction, that instruction to keep it scripted, to keep it tight, is consistent with what they've been doing since the beginning of their time here in government, Mr. Speaker. Comments related to remarks I made a couple days ago about rewriting the way things are, rewriting the history. The member from Northwest likes to bring up 16 years and for some time the members opposite have been promoting a number of myths as I believe it, about what occurred and why we are in the current position where spending decisions on programs to help people are able to be made in certain areas.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to address the area of how the Sask Party government is failing students. I would like to address how the Sask Party government has missed the mark on a number of student issues, Mr. Speaker. When times are going well, Mr. Speaker, we know from recent reporting that the

province is sitting on . . . has billions of dollars at its disposal, Mr. Speaker. When times are going well, we believe that the boom times should be benefiting everyone and that clearly includes students, Mr. Speaker. It includes many groups but students cannot be forgotten in this mix.

What we've seen to date, Mr. Speaker, is a failing of meeting students' immediate needs. The immediate needs that are facing, for example, university students that are paying tuition at Saskatchewan institutions. We've seen some focus on the retention end, Mr. Speaker, basically accomplishing the things that the previous NDP program was already doing. And we've seen some changes on the retention end of things to make the Sask Party program more like the NDP program.

But what we've seen, Mr. Speaker, is the failure of the Sask Party government to address education issues on the accessibility front end of education, to address the issues of students who need to pay tuition, who want to pursue training in this case at the universities in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, that financial times are quite strong in the province, what we see from this government is a step backwards, a step in the wrong direction, Mr. Speaker.

[12:00]

For a number of years students in this province have been enjoying the benefits of a tuition freeze that was put in place by the previous NDP government, and a tuition freeze that was put in place in co-operation with the universities, Mr. Speaker. I say that because this is a point that the government side fails to clearly state to students, fails to clearly state to people. The NDP tuition freezes of years past were fully funded tuition freezes, so they were tuition freezes with dollars attached.

In the Sask Party's own literature of last year, Mr. Speaker, the one year where they continued on in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, in terms of maintaining the tuition freeze, in their own documents they stated \$25.5 million as the cost of that tuition freeze. The Sask Party government knows how much the tuition freeze . . . what expense that tuition freeze is. Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that they know how much that tuition freeze is, they are choosing to pass that burden on to students.

It was some months ago, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Advanced Education floated the idea out to students that the tuition freeze would be lifted. One can only assume, Mr. Speaker, given the vague floating of this idea, the way he stirred up concern among the student population, that the \$25.5 million will be picked up by the students.

Now the minister floated the notion of a tuition management system. Now what this tuition management system is, Mr. Speaker, is a mystery to everyone in the province. It's a mystery, Mr. Speaker, because in typical fashion, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — It seems like we have a number of members who would like to enter the debate with a lot of information. And we'll allow the member from Saskatoon Massey Place to finish his comments, and then we'll allow other members in. The member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — I do thank the member from Indian Head-Milestone for helping me with my dress here, but I will carry on with my speech as time does march on.

Mr. Speaker, what we saw on the issue of a tuition management system is a bunch of question marks. We have a situation where the minister floated an idea without providing the details. The minister floated an idea without providing assurances to the students that they indeed would have a role in this process. We've had an idea that has been floated, but we have not had the facts.

We have not had any sort of evidence given to students to allow student unions to feel that their concerns are indeed being heard. To me that suggests, Mr. Speaker, that this idea of the tuition management system is an idea that is being made up on the fly, an idea that has not been properly thought out, but an idea that is being created just sort of as the weeks go by. Maybe a bit of work here, a bit of work there, but no clear articulation of what this tuition management system is. So it leaves students wondering what will this tuition management system be, what sort of input will they have to ensure that education can remain accessible and affordable to students.

On an ongoing basis, I've had the privilege of presenting petitions, Mr. Speaker, organized by student unions here in the province who are speaking to these issues, who are concerned about the issues of accessibility for all students.

So the member from Moose Jaw talked about the need for child care spaces. The member from Saskatoon Centre spoke about the need for increased focus on housing. Two clear areas where the Sask Party government is failing the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, my comments have been limited to the area of student concerns and student needs. And in my opinion, what we've seen, we've seen a decrease in affordability for students, and we've seen an increase in debt. And that's what the end result of this process will be with the tuition freeze being lifted.

We've seen a decrease in affordability, and we've seen an increase of uncertainty among the student population. Mr. Speaker, we've seen a decrease in affordability, but an increase of confusion among students because of the lack of clarity that this government has explained their proposed tuition management system. So, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Debate has completed and on the 65 minutes. We now have 10-minute question. I recognize the member from Yorkton.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member from Saskatoon Centre. Now over the past year, every time we've had an announcement, we've heard a lot of we were planning to do that, we were just going to get to that. And no doubt the members opposite are very aware these groups have been asking for help for years.

The members across must have been aware of the plight since

they were government and would have been getting inquiries. There is a difference between knowing the problem and doing something about it though, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite say they didn't have the money on hand that the province has now. And this is true. There's a lot more money in the provincial coffers right now. But they did however have hundreds of millions of dollars with which to do something but chose to do little, if nothing.

The member referred to the St. Mary School project or the inner-city projects in Saskatoon's core, where they chose to fund a new investment in a new project in the then premier's area. My question is, why did they bump and re-announce the St. Mary's School project for nine years before going ahead with this other project?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we were busy building the economy of this province. And many people . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . They can laugh. They can laugh, but a lot of people have remarked how this government seems to have discovered oil the day after the election. The same with potash.

No, a lot of things were happening, Mr. Speaker. We did a lot of good work, especially in the core communities when you talk about White Buffalo — a lot of good work.

But I have a real problem, this government in their ad hoc approach to how they do things in this province, and this is really a problem. People are saying if you get to the minister first, you'll get something. But there's no big vision, no big plan. I have a real concern about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Mr. Furber: — The member from Yorkton just said that there's a difference between knowing and doing, and so I find it an interesting point that he made. I'd like to ask the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley if, in that vein, there's a difference between knowing and doing, why is it that housing wasn't mentioned in their election platform even once?

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

Ms. Ross: — Well thank you very much. I appreciate the question from the member opposite, but I'm a female not a male, and so maybe he can remember that.

One of the things that I'd like to talk about is the important things that we have addressed. We have addressed housing. You know, I had the wonderful opportunity to represent the minister at a sod-turning session at Maple Leaf Estates. Again there we were, we were looking at innovative ways of providing very affordable and moderate housing to the most needy in this province.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — I would like to ask the member from Saskatoon Centre. I'd like to know why, with the hundreds of millions of dollars that they lost outside of this province in bad investments, the hundreds of millions of dollars in schemes like SPUDCO, why they made announcement year after year, including the last year before the election, how they were going to build St. Mary's School, and then postponed it eight years down the waiting list? And how they were to back project Station 20 that was pork-barrelled with a number of NDP people on the board, that quite frankly was five times overinflated for what it's worth, and yet at the same time ignore a commitment to the city of Saskatoon for housing? So I would like to ask him how they could neglect the inner city of Saskatoon and our most vulnerable in their greatest need.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting thing. These folks keep going back to talk about Station 20 as if it was one of their proudest moments. And I think they should be totally embarrassed and shamed, ashamed of what they did. You know, with the amount of fundraising that's going on around Station 20 and the fact that there were \$250,000 invested in the research to make sure that project worked — \$250,000 — and they call it pork-barrelling. I think the people of Saskatoon and this province will be very interested to read the comments of what that member has called those people involved in that comment.

Mr. Speaker, we're very happy about the kind of work that we've done in the inner cities and right throughout this province. You know, they talk a lot about the food banks and things like that, and they talk about the different supports. Are they actually delivering on that, Mr. Speaker? I don't think so.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the member from Regina Qu'Appelle. The people of Saskatchewan are dealing with ever-increasing costs of housing and utilities. So I want the member to explain why the government cancelled the lowest cost utility bundle with a 20 per cent energy increase.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Qu'Appelle.

Ms. Ross: — Thank you very much for the question from the member opposite. Now one of the things that we are very pleased with is the financial support that we are providing to members of our society who are the most vulnerable. And so in fact, we have not come up with ad hoc programs, but rather, in fact, through the Ministry of Social Services, we have planned very well programming to ensure that people who, and residents who are having some difficulty in paying those fees, are helped. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — I would like to ask the same member from Saskatoon central. Our government is working hard to build a better life for Saskatchewan's seniors. We recognize that many of our seniors are on fixed incomes and are struggling with dealing with higher costs. We have put into place free eye examination, free chiropractor, reduced deductions on prescription plans. They're now eligible for SIP [seniors' income plan]. We would like to know why the members opposite are so against this assistance of our seniors.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[12:00]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — I assume I'm the same member. But I'm very happy to answer this question because, you know, when the minister made her ministerial statement . . . And many of us applauded the initiative. We think it's an important initiative but it's very important it's done well.

Seniors don't have an error of margin. And we've seen that, how this file's been handled. I am very happy to hear that their rent won't be clawed back in Sask Housing units. That's very important.

But the other day in committee I raised this concern, which is a very important issue. Many seniors, many people who are working, invest their savings in the Saskatchewan Pension Plan. And you're familiar with that; that was one that was started in the '80s. They have been saving their money for over 20 years. Here's a group that is very vulnerable to having a clawback.

And the minister did not deny that night that they may be in fact facing a clawback. Because they're only getting maybe \$100. The most from the annual report is \$300, but it's averaging \$100. That's very vulnerable. These people — some 1,400, 1,500 people who are collecting income from Saskatchewan Pension Plan — may be seeing that money clawed back. And I think that's something that side should worry about.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member from Yorkton. In light of the strong financial position that our economy is in, why is the Sask Party government forcing at least \$25.5 million on the backs of students, and when will the Sask Party government provide more details about the tuition management system? Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't claim to know a whole lot about the Advanced Education file; I'd have to go to my hon. member from Saskatoon for that.

What I can comment on, Mr. Speaker, though, is a lot of the initiatives we have done to save money for the people of the province. We've done historical tax cuts that provide income relief or extra income for all people of the province. We have a \$20,000 tuition rebate program to address the tuition cost of students that stay and work in the province. And through other initiatives, Mr. Speaker, there's more money coming to more people across the province through a lot of the announcements of the Throne Speech. So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Ross: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member opposite from Saskatoon Centre. For the past 16 years Saskatchewan has trailed most other provinces and territories in the level of financial support to our seniors. In fact in the past the NDP government wanted to raise the long-term care fees for seniors . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed on the 75-minute debate.

[12:15]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

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

Motion No. 3 — Loss of Confidence in the Government

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to move and speak to a motion in respect to affordability. And the motion reads as follows:

That due to this government's spending choices, which are ignoring the government's major responsibility to address the immediate needs of the Saskatchewan people such as high utility rates, high property taxes, dropping of the tuition freeze, and the lack of affordable housing and child care, this Assembly no longer has confidence in the Premier and his government.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are fond of now casting their minds back not to their first year in office so much, Mr. Speaker, as the time immediately preceding that. And in this Chamber, on the part of the government, we have so often heard revisionism and revisionist history take the place of action, and rhetoric take the place of policy, Mr. Speaker.

And one of my favourite examples of that is, when confronted with the \$800 million in equalization payments that all members of this House at one time agreed was owing to the people of Saskatchewan, and members on this side of the House still believe are owing to the people of Saskatchewan but members on that side of the House only believe are owing when there's a Liberal government in Ottawa. They do not believe they're owing when there's a Conservative government in Ottawa.

And when we raise or when anyone raises, Mr. Speaker, the surrender, the surrender to Ottawa by the Premier and by the Premier's Saskatchewan Party government, there's talk of this

special relationship and how much this special relationship has brought to the people of Saskatchewan. And we get a little bit of revisionist history from across the way as well, Mr. Speaker, at that time.

One of my favourites — and the Premier's done this once; maybe he's done it more than once, but at least once — in exchange for this \$800 million a year, Mr. Speaker, we are to be very pleased with \$10 million more for the synchrotron. And then he follows that with saying, and the previous government got nothing. Well except, Mr. Speaker, except the synchrotron. And that is typical. That is typical of the government revisionist history because of course whenever they talk about anything obtained or added to a program or an institution that existed within the province of Saskatchewan, they in the next breath have to pretend that what they added to had never existed, Mr. Speaker, because of course they're the only government that has done anything at all.

Mr. Speaker, that's one of my favourites. I mean they praise now accomplishments that they previously denigrated. They are now proud of policies that they previously attacked, Mr. Speaker.

This morning we had happy news in this House. We had happy news. Not only did we have a credit upgrade, Mr. Speaker, we had, I think, the first Conservative Party credit upgrade in the history of our province. Everybody in Saskatchewan should be pleased. Some are astounded, Mr. Speaker. This is a once-in-a-lifetime event, at least so far, Mr. Speaker.

But the members opposite want to look at recent history, and we should look at recent history, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan has been a have province now, Saskatchewan has been a have province for about five years, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance wonders why we are not more excited about Saskatchewan being a have province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we've been excited about Saskatchewan being a have province for about five years. The excitement has only spread to the Saskatchewan Party recently, Mr. Speaker. They were not so pleased about it year after year after year when they were in opposition. Now suddenly they're pleased. I think we should all be pleased, Mr. Speaker.

But while we're walking down memory lane, let's not go back too far. It's an easy question. When was the last time, when was the last time that Saskatchewan was a have province and the most affordable place to live in Canada? The year before they were elected, Mr. Speaker. That is the last time that was the case, Mr. Speaker. In the three or four years prior to the election of the Saskatchewan Party, Saskatchewan was both a have province and the most affordable place to live in the country, Mr. Speaker. That is no longer the case, Mr. Speaker.

And there is talk about . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Mr. Speaker, I can pause while the Minister of Education makes his comments. Mr. Speaker, I believe I have the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: — There has been a little more conversation going on. I would ask the members to recognize the member that has the floor. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, people of Saskatchewan have heard the reading out of statistics, some of which are months old, that establish quite clearly that Saskatchewan has had a boom. And many people in Saskatchewan are wondering in how this boom has affected them, why their circumstances have not changed, why their circumstances have become worse, Mr. Speaker.

And as we proceed into the winter coming, as we proceed into this winter there is a need for immediate relief on a number of fronts for many, many people in Saskatchewan because their lives are less affordable than they were before the boom, Mr. Speaker, and before this Saskatchewan Party government took power, Mr. Speaker. Many of us will go home for the holidays. Some will go homeless for the holidays, Mr. Speaker. And that is the developing truth in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The government has inherited a \$2 billion surplus. The Finance critic, when the Saskatchewan Party was opposition, was fond of talking about a mountain of money. Well compared to the surplus on which this government sits, Mr. Speaker, the member from Sutherland, the Finance critic of the day, the current Minister Responsible for Crown Investments Corporation, Mr. Speaker, was making a molehill into a mountain of money. This indeed now is actually a mountain of money.

And, Mr. Speaker, members opposite now don't call it a slush fund. They call it an insurance policy, Mr. Speaker. Now what is an insurance policy for? Is it an insurance policy for people facing ever-increasing rents, Mr. Speaker? Well no, it is not. Is it an insurance policy for people facing ever-increasing utility rates, Mr. Speaker? No, it is not. Is it an insurance policy for people who are looking for real property tax relief? No, it is not, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is it an insurance policy for students concerned about rising tuition costs? Rising housing costs? Rising expenses while they are going to school? No, it is not, Mr. Speaker.

It's not an insurance policy for any of those people, Mr. Speaker. It is an insurance policy for the members opposite. It is a political insurance policy leading up to the next election. While the clouds gather on the horizon, and we understand what the global economic situation is, Mr. Speaker, who gets insured, Mr. Speaker? Is it the renters? Is it the taxpayers? Is it the homeowners? Is it the students? Is it the people on fixed incomes? No, Mr. Speaker, it is not.

It is the government that gets the insurance, Mr. Speaker. They get to sit on the insurance policy. And as people are wondering how they're going to pay their rent, how they're going to stay in their homes, how they're going to heat those homes, Mr. Speaker, we have a government that is smug and snug with their insurance policies. And the government has its insurance policy; the people of Saskatchewan do not, Mr. Speaker.

It is time for the Saskatchewan Party to get off of their mountain of money and help the people of Saskatchewan, and to work to keep Saskatchewan affordable. With Saskatchewan's resources paying big dividends to the Government of Saskatchewan, it's time for the Sask Party to give some of it back to the Saskatchewan people, and to give some of it back

before this winter gets colder and darker, Mr. Speaker.

They gave back only 10 per cent with their tax cut, and that's not coming this winter, that's not coming this year. They are sitting on 60 per cent of the surplus — \$2 billion in the bank.

The utility rates are going up 20 per cent — 27 per cent in the case of SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker, 5 per cent or more in the case of SaskPower. The minister isn't very forthcoming, Mr. Speaker, not very forthcoming at all about what they are.

In the past, in the past, Mr. Speaker, when there were much smaller surpluses than this, when there were much smaller surpluses than this during the 16 years of NDP government, there was a payback, a rebate to Saskatchewan people to cover their heating costs over the winter, Mr. Speaker. That was the circumstance. That was the case, and that was done when the surplus was much less, when the resource revenues were much less, when the energy revenues were much less. That was the circumstance, Mr. Speaker. That is the circumstance in Conservative Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

As this winter comes, the effect of the policy in Conservative Alberta will be that Albertans will be receiving a rebate on their natural gas rates of \$40 while people in Saskatchewan will be paying a 27 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker.

Not only was this the past practice of NDP governments, not only is this the practice of the Alberta government, it was what the opposition called for when they were in opposition, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party called for when they were in opposition, Mr. Speaker. Say anything in opposition; do nothing in government, Mr. Speaker. That's the circumstance.

Housing costs are going up in some cases 50 per cent. People are getting successive rent increases. The NDP calls on the government to provide property tax relief, not only property tax payers directly as home owners, but to renters as well. And the response from the government, Mr. Speaker, is resounding silence, as was the call for natural gas rebates from the opposition to the government, Mr. Speaker.

Rents are skyrocketing. Saskatoon is tied with — wait, Mr. Speaker — Vancouver for the fourth lowest vacancy rate in Canada. The rental supply is dropping. The cost of rent is going up. People are crowding together, Mr. Speaker. We will not be surprised if domestic violence rates and health disparities continue to increase if these intractable problems cannot be addressed when we are crowding people together, tighter and tighter and more and more people in smaller and smaller spaces, because we cannot address, the government will not address, the housing crisis in our province.

Property taxes are on the rise. And I know, and I've commented here before, Mr. Speaker, that a number of people in Saskatoon Meewasin voted for the Saskatchewan Party believing that there was going to be not a study of property tax, not talk about property tax, not maybe some suggestion about what they might do about property tax in June of 2009, but that there would be relief for property tax. Well, Mr. Speaker, they are disappointed, and there's no question about that. There's no question about that, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government applied a 10 per cent rebate to municipal property taxes. The Saskatchewan Party that's campaigned on this issue, campaigned on this issue quite stridently, 2 per cent. Mr. Speaker — 10 per cent, 2 per cent; 10 per cent, 2 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

The Agriculture minister has won the award for being the most honest member across the way. The press, the press I think awarded that to him when he said, "In opposition, I could say just about anything I wanted and I did on a lot of occasions for 12 years."

Now the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has always seemed to me to be sort of a cat's paw for the Saskatchewan Party in this province, Mr. Speaker. They would raise an issue. If it took fire, the Saskatchewan Party would raise the issue. If they raised an issue and it didn't catch fire, Mr. Speaker, well we'd get silence. It was quite remarkable.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is I would think fairly sympathetic to the members opposite and to their . . . The Canadian Taxpayers Federation I think is fairly friendly to the members opposite. And this is what they had to say about the government's performance, Mr. Speaker, quote "Lots of opposition thunder, no government rain." And I think that sort of sums up what we have seen from the transition. Say anything in opposition, do nothing in government. Do nothing in government, Mr. Speaker.

[12:30]

Saskatchewan had long been known as the most affordable place to live, of the quality of life that simply could not be beat. And at the time, at the time, a have province and a most affordable place to live in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

The momentum, the boom, has brought about challenges that the government is not quite willing to address, Mr. Speaker. The needs of Saskatchewan people have always been there, there's no denying that. The opportunities aren't always there, Mr. Speaker, but the opportunity is certainly there now, Mr. Speaker. What is lacking now is not either a need to be filled, or the opportunity to fill it, Mr. Speaker, if the insurance policy was meant to protect Saskatchewan people instead of the Saskatchewan Party and the Saskatchewan government, Mr. Speaker. The ability to address the need is certainly there. What is lacking is the will and the vision to apply the opportunities, the resources available, to the need that is there, Mr. Speaker.

So soaring interest, utility rates, rising rents, rising housing costs, increasing tuition, and from the government on these immediate needs, nothing, Mr. Speaker. Nothing of substance whatsoever, except revisionism instead of action; rhetoric instead of policy.

Information released by the Association of Regina Realtors shows that on a year-to-date basis the average price of a home in Regina was up 47 per cent over the previous year, and the property taxes will rise with that, Mr. Speaker. I think the fortunate people in Saskatchewan are actually people who of course owned their homes before these property prices started to go up. And, Mr. Speaker, they are the fortunate ones. Now when they look and wonder how their children are going to get

into the housing market, I think they have some concerns.

We also have some immediate concerns around property taxes, Mr. Speaker. A concern amongst a number of people of Saskatchewan — people who can afford their rent, even; and people who can afford their homes; and people who can afford their property taxes — it's what's happening to their neighbours, and the increasing concern, increasing issue, the crisis of homelessness in the province, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd like to read from a couple of stories that were in major newspapers in Saskatchewan. And from Tuesday, October 28, 2008, from *The StarPhoenix* in Saskatoon. Quote:

It used to be unusual for anyone with a job to show up at the YWCA crisis shelter in Saskatoon, looking for a warm place to sleep.

Those days are gone — and more than ever, the shelter is forced to turn homeless women and their children away because it has no room for them, says executive director Barb Macpherson.

“Quite regularly there is one person staying in the shelter who is working,” she [told *The StarPhoenix*] . . .”

The Deputy Speaker: — I know it's Thursday, and most members are kind of anxious about going home and having some fun, but there's a little more conversations going on, and I'm having trouble hearing the member that has the floor. So I'd ask that the members carry their conversations on behind the bar.

I recognize the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — With all respect to the Minister of Education, I have some comments to make about the homeless in Saskatoon, and I'm going to make them. And I know he hasn't heard any of it so far. So I know he wouldn't have wanted to be interrupting while I was saying this, and I'm sure he won't want to now.

“Quite regularly there is one person staying in the shelter who is working,” she . . . [told *The StarPhoenix*] in an interview Monday. “We're also seeing more families — so moms with their kids who had housing, but then rent gets jacked up and they can't afford it so they buy groceries instead of paying the rent, and then they get evicted.”

During the course of its last fiscal year — from June 2007 to June 2008 — the 38-bed shelter on 25th Street gave 915 people a temporary place to stay while they looked for new accommodations, including 403 children . . . [according to] the organization's recent annual report.

In a typical year, the number of people turned away for lack of space at the YWCA would be about the same as the number taken in, but last year the number turned away exploded by more than 50 per cent, reaching 1,468.

Mr. Speaker, I take a break from the quotation for a moment. So in the midst of the boom, Mr. Speaker, in the midst of the boom, there's a boom in the use of the crisis shelter in

Saskatoon. I go on quoting from the article:

“Homelessness has been growing in this city in recent years and it has been further impacted by Saskatoon's economic boom that saw last year's rental increases reaching 13.7 per cent over the previous year,” Macpherson noted.

“And people are also staying (at the shelter) longer because it's taking them longer to find the housing they need and get back into the community.”

Women who bring their children to the YWCA for emergency shelter have often just made the decision to leave an abusive domestic situation, Macpherson noted. Rather than sending them back onto the street with nowhere to go when the shelter is full, staff help make arrangements through other social agencies such as the Salvation Army.

In some cases, Social Services ends up covering the costs of a night in a cheap motel room — hardly a long-term solution [but, Mr. Speaker, as we heard earlier today, the government's solution to foster children as well].

“Say you're a single mom with three children under the age of four and you've just escaped violence in the home,” she said. “What you need is counseling and some supports. Can you imagine being in that situation, stuck in a hotel along with your kids, and nothing else?”

Now, Mr. Speaker, this problem has not gone away since October. And I could read a similar article from the *Leader-Post* about the Regina crisis centre. And perhaps I'll have an occasion to do that, Mr. Speaker, before I'm done my remarks. This situation hasn't changed, Mr. Speaker, and all the glad-handing and backslapping on the other side today about the economy, Mr. Speaker, doesn't address or even show concern for the issue of people not having homes in Saskatchewan. It's not Vancouver, Mr. Speaker. It's not Victoria, Mr. Speaker. This is a hard place to be homeless.

And when there are suggestions proposed by this opposition as to how to address this matter and particularly rent relief, the answer from that government is resounding silence, Mr. Speaker. It is resounding silence.

For years in opposition, Saskatchewan Party demanded an immediate solution to property tax, saying that enough study had occurred and it was time to act. Once elected however, the tune changed. Say one thing in opposition; do something else or do nothing in government, Mr. Speaker. Suddenly more study was needed, and the Premier appointed the Rosetown MLA to further study the issue and further study the issue and further study the issue. And we may not see this study before we rise next spring, Mr. Speaker.

And as I said, Mr. Speaker, property tax relief was provided. The opposition said 10 per cent was insufficient. Now they're in government, 2 per cent is obviously sufficient.

And if you can afford your home and if you can afford your rent, Mr. Speaker, winter is coming. Under previous NDP

governments there would've been a plan for relief for high natural gas rates. If you were in Alberta, there would be a plan for relief for high natural gas rates. But in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, there is no plan. There is no relief, Mr. Speaker. There is no relief.

The opposition Saskatchewan Party, a year ago and prior to that, liked to talk about how they would run the Crowns on a businesslike basis. Well, Mr. Speaker, what is the result for Saskatchewan people? The result is that when natural gas is at \$6.50 a gigajoule, the Saskatchewan people under a businesslike operation by the Saskatchewan Party are paying \$8.50 a gigajoule.

Now I know how the gas variance account works, Mr. Speaker. I know how that works, Mr. Speaker. I do; I do. But the result to Saskatchewan people is that they're paying more than the resource fetches on the market. That's the result of having a businesslike government that's going to do things differently.

In fact they say, well you know we're not going to do things differently. And there's a whole group of fronts we're not going to differently on, but the one thing they are going to do differently is they're not going to provide any relief. They're not going to provide the relief that an NDP government would provide in a similar circumstance, Mr. Speaker. So we have a 20, 27 per cent increase on natural gas, Mr. Speaker, going into this winter — no relief coming from this government. No intention of providing relief, Mr. Speaker, although we continue to call for it. We continue to call for it, Mr. Speaker, and we will not stop calling for it.

And on the electricity side, Mr. Speaker, well the minister isn't very forthcoming. At least 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker, at least a 5 per cent increase in electricity. I suspect a great deal more. There is considerable appetite on the other side of this House, on the government side of the House, to talk about how we should make electricity. There's a lot of appetite for a debate by the government on how we're going to produce electricity. There's very little appetite for a discussion by the government on how we are collectively or individually going to pay for that electricity, Mr. Speaker, which is a very important part of a discussion. How you make it, yes, I think that's important, Mr. Speaker. How we're going to pay for it, that's also important, Mr. Speaker.

And let's look at a couple of examples. We have the stated position of the government that we will have in Saskatchewan . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I ask members to cease from shouting from their desks. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have the stated position of the government that we should have in the province of Saskatchewan — and we may hear more about this later on today, and perhaps that's where some of the members opposite want to rush off to — that we should have in this province one or two privately owned nuclear reactors, with the investment in infrastructure to deliver the electricity from those reactors to the people of Saskatchewan, and for export apparently, Mr. Speaker, to be paid for by the people of

Saskatchewan. So private profit, public investment.

How much is this going to cost the people of Saskatchewan for their electricity bills or other subsidies, taxes, however they're going to pay for it? Mr. Speaker, nothing forthcoming. A lot to say about how we're going to make it, Mr. Speaker, not too much forthcoming about who's going to pay and how much, Mr. Speaker. And this is in a context of rising utility rates. Anyways, Mr. Speaker, we have this prospect.

Then another example of how the government is much more willing to discuss how we make electricity than who is going to pay for it, and that's clean coal, Mr. Speaker. The national government looks like they're going to be in the very happy position where they're going to have a project that's going to cost a billion and a half dollars minimum — minimum, Mr. Speaker, a billion and a half dollars. And they can have that project.

It's going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, help them meet their Kyoto protocols or international obligations the national government can point to, Mr. Speaker. And the beauty of it for the national government is at least \$1 billion of that is going to be paid for by the Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker — this national project on national targets — because the provincial government no longer has targets, Mr. Speaker. They abandoned their targets. But we still have national targets on greenhouse gas emissions. The national government is going to get to meet them, and the Saskatchewan people are going to pay for it, Mr. Speaker.

And this is the math. This is the math. This is math because we've a \$1.4 billion project, assuming no cost overruns. We have \$240 million coming from the national government. Prime Minister Harper says no, not a penny more — no cost overruns being paid for by Ottawa — no more than the \$240 million. So that \$1.2 billion being paid for by the Saskatchewan people.

So what's the math on that, Mr. Speaker? That's \$1,000 — \$1,000 or more for every man, woman, child in the province of Saskatchewan for this national project. And for the rest of Canadians who have been receiving the benefits of equalization payments that we should have been receiving, \$800 million, for the rest of Canadians who have been receiving that money when Saskatchewan people have not, oh I think less than \$10, Mr. Speaker.

Listen. If you got the Saskatchewan equalization tax cut of Quebec, a 700 million tax cut, \$700 million tax cut in Quebec and we didn't get our \$800 million in equalization, you're going to have to pay, oh maybe \$8 for this national project, this clean coal project, knowing that the people of Saskatchewan will have to pay over \$1,000 each man, woman, and child for that project, Mr. Speaker. That's it.

And the Premier should take, the Premier should take the kick-me sign off, the Stephen-kick-me sign off his back, and should have it emblazoned in bronze and put on the Premier's office, Mr. Speaker. They should say, kick us, Stephen, kick us because we're going to pay. We're going to pay \$1,000, man, woman, and child for this national project so that the national government can look good on greenhouse gas emissions. We're going to do that.

[12:45]

And, Mr. Speaker, I mean, it is just amazing, you know. On nuclear energy, private profit, public investment. On clean coal, political points in Ottawa, we'll pay the bill here in Saskatchewan. That's just fine, Stephen. Kick us. Kick us, Mr. Speaker. In the face of rising utility rates, it's very interesting that the government has such an appetite for discussing how we're going to make electricity but don't really want to talk about who and how we're going to pay for it, Mr. Speaker — not at all, not at all.

Now I've discussed housing and the lack of housing, Mr. Speaker. I've discussed rent and the lack of relief for renters. I've discussed utility rates and the refusal of the government to provide relief with funds that they have available, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — And I want to turn to the circumstance that our students find themselves in, Mr. Speaker. And you know, all the things I've said about the lack of housing and increasing rent and the government's refusal to act on the housing crisis, on the homelessness crisis, Mr. Speaker; the government's refusal to act on rents and to provide rent relief, Mr. Speaker; to provide real property tax relief, Mr. Speaker; the government's refusal to provide any relief on utility rates or devising ways of making Saskatchewan people pay more for somebody else's benefit, Mr. Speaker — all these impinge upon students, who don't have high incomes, Mr. Speaker.

But you want to add, this government wants to add, Mr. Speaker, on top of all that, increased tuition costs, Mr. Speaker. Now since the '70s the proportion of cost paid for by the student for his education have steadily risen, and it got to the point, Mr. Speaker, where that proportion was as high and great as it had been at its highest in the Great Depression, perhaps being at its lowest in the '70s, during the government of Allan Blakeney which one of the members opposite was so critical of. This cost the students their own education as a portion of the total cost . . . [inaudible] . . . risen. And arguably, Mr. Speaker — arguably, some Bachelor of Arts students were paying the entire cost of their education, Mr. Speaker.

Well no one is more an advocate of university economy in this House than me, I don't think. And I understand the university's reluctance to acknowledge that the negotiated monies that were available under the NDP administration to keep tuition level with a freeze. But for the purposes of shorthand, I'm going to call it a freeze, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP, there was a freeze on tuitions. And one of the reasons I'm going to call it a freeze, Mr. Speaker, is because not only was that the effect for students, but that was a word that I think everybody understands, Mr. Speaker.

Now we don't have a freeze any more. Now tuitions can rise. And the Minister of Advanced Education says he has a tuition management system, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister is very fond of speaking in matrixes and synergies and paradigms. With the minister, matrixes and synergies are a paradigm a dozen, Mr. Speaker.

But the students can't live in his matrixes. They can't eat his synergies, and they can't pay their tuition with his paradigms. And it's not the job of a minister, Mr. Speaker, it is not the job of a minister to try to sound clever. It's the job of the minister to try to act intelligently, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Advanced Education fails in the former in any case, and doesn't even try in the latter case, Mr. Speaker. When . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I know that we're getting close to going home, but if the members keep persisting on shouting from their chairs, there could be a couple members going home a little earlier. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, when the students last winter held a day on campus in Saskatoon at the University of Saskatchewan to bring attention to housing concerns that they had, Mr. Speaker, city councillors attended. Members of the opposition caucus attended. The Minister Responsible, the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education did not, did not attend, Mr. Speaker. The minister who lives in Saskatoon, represents a seat in Saskatoon, did not attend. The minister does not like to attend events where he actually has to answer questions, actually has to answer questions, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't. He doesn't.

Now I have some, I have some advice for the minister when he's explaining what the tuition management system is, Mr. Speaker. I have some advice for him from Winston Churchill. Now I know Winston Churchill is only considered one of the great orators of the 20th century, and I know that he won a Nobel Prize for Literature, but he may still have a lesson for the Minister of Advanced Education. And Prime Minister Churchill said, "Broadly speaking, the short words are the best . . ." Mr. Speaker. And freeze is a short word. It is a word that illuminates. It is a word that doesn't obscure, Mr. Speaker.

The language of the Minister of Education is always designed to obscure that either he doesn't understand the policy of the government or he doesn't want to explain the policy of the government. And that's how we get into the situation, Mr. Speaker, where we have the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour rising in this House and implicitly arguing that musical therapists are essential to clearing the highways in the winter in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of action and the kind of information we receive from that minister, Mr. Speaker.

But going into this winter, going into this winter, university students facing higher rents, higher heating costs — these are the ones that can find a place to live, Mr. Speaker — and now thanks to the Minister of Advanced Education's new paradigm, new paradigm, the tuition management system, they're going to be facing higher tuition as well, Mr. Speaker.

So this is, this is the record of inaction. This is the record of revisionism and rhetoric that we have from the government after a year in office. We have a situation where Saskatchewan remains as it has been for four or five years, a have province, Mr. Speaker, but now no longer, no longer, as was the case a year ago, a year ago, Mr. Speaker, when there was a government willing to provide rent rebates, to provide property tax relief to renters and homeowners, when there was a

government willing to soften the blow of natural gas increases. Their record is clear, Mr. Speaker, on all those. When there was a government willing to pay for a tuition freeze — because an affordable, accessible, non-quality education has no value, Mr. Speaker — it was fully funded. A year ago, those were the circumstances, Mr. Speaker. This was a have province. But it was a have province that was the most affordable place to live in this country.

So Saskatchewan is still a have province, and we all hope, we all hope sincerely, Mr. Speaker, that it remains a have province. But, Mr. Speaker, it is no longer the most affordable place to live in Canada. Housing costs are as high here as they are in Calgary or Vancouver, Mr. Speaker. At one time they were the highest in the country. Rents have increased dramatically over the last year. The supply of rental accommodation has decreased, Mr. Speaker. The two are very connected, Mr. Speaker.

When the government has to be forthcoming about what they're going to do on utility rates, as they had to have been in the case of SaskEnergy, we find that they're approaching 30 per cent, Mr. Speaker. They're approaching 30 per cent. And when they are asked why they can't follow the practice of previous governments who, with less money, provided relief — silence. When they're asked why they can't provide relief as the neighbouring Conservative province provides — resounding silence. And on the subject of electricity, Mr. Speaker, on that subject, they're not even forthcoming on what the increases are going to be.

But we've been almost promised that we are going to pay, the people of Saskatchewan are going to pay to make nuclear power profitable for somebody, Mr. Speaker. Nuclear power cannot necessarily be made easily profitable, but the people of Saskatchewan are being committed by the government to make it profitable. At what cost, Mr. Speaker? We don't know. We don't know. If the government knows, they're not saying, Mr. Speaker.

But we do know the costs . . . well we know the minimum cost on clean coal and their commitments to keeping that special relationship a special relationship, Mr. Speaker. We thought and the Saskatchewan Party at one time thought that the \$800 million would be coming to Saskatchewan. Now it appears that it's going to Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. It's going to Ottawa to pay for what they should be paying for — a national project, Mr. Speaker.

So on every one of these fronts where, you know, the government likes to talk about this being this year country, on every one of these fronts, nothing is being done this year. Nothing is being done this year on rent. Nothing is being done this year on property tax. Nothing is being done to hold the line on tuitions. Nothing is being done to hold the line on utility costs.

This year, Mr. Speaker, this winter, which some people face homeless, Mr. Speaker, which some people face desperate, Mr. Speaker, this year, this winter nothing is being done by this government because the insurance policy is not for people wondering where they're going to live, how they're going to pay the rent, how they're going to heat their homes, how they're

going to pay their taxes, how they're going to pay their tuition. That's not who the insurance policy is for. Insurance policy is for the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. That is their 2011 insurance policy, Mr. Speaker, and nobody who needs it this winter is going to see a dime of it, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That due to this government's spending choices, which are ignoring the government's major responsibility to address the immediate needs of the Saskatchewan people such as high utility rates, high property taxes, a dropping of the tuition freeze, and a lack of affordable housing and child care, this Assembly no longer has confidence in the Premier and his government.

I so move, Mr. Speaker. And in the few moments left for me, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the revisionism . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Before I read the motion, I just want to make one comment. On the blues that the members have, there was an error in printing, which I just want to let them know that this is the correct motion here and that it was just an error in printing. It wasn't an error in the way that the motion was submitted. The member from Saskatoon Meewasin has made a motion:

That due to this government's spending choices, which are ignoring the government's major responsibility to address the immediate needs of the Saskatchewan people such as high utility rates, high property taxes, a dropping of the tuition freeze, and a lack of affordable housing and child care, this Assembly no longer has confidence in the Premier and his government.

Is the member . . . ready for the question? I recognize the member from Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to put in an amendment to the motion, and the motion amended would read:

That all the words after the word "That" be removed and the following be substituted therefore:

this Assembly congratulates the government for its sound stewardship and spending choices and this Assembly enjoys the confidence in the Premier and his government.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Wood River has moved amendment:

That all the words after "That" be removed and the following be submitted therefore:

That this Assembly congratulates the government for its sound stewardship and spending choices and this Assembly enjoys the confidence in the Premier and his government.

I see that the time of adjournment has been passed. I will now say that this House stands adjourned until 1:30 Monday afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.]

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Hon. Bill Boyd
Minister of Energy and Resources
Minister Responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Ken CHEVELDAYOFF
Minister of Crown Corporations

Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Minister of Government Services
Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Liquor and
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Hon. June Draude
Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations
Minister Responsible for Northern Affairs

Hon. Wayne Elhard
Minister of Highways and Infrastructure
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Provincial Secretary

Hon. Rod Gantfoer
Minister of Finance

Hon. Donna Harpauer
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