



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 Kelvington-Wadena.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine, Viola Bell, who is sitting in your gallery today. Viola is the president of the Sturgis Métis Local. She was an LPN [licensed practical nurse]. She's a farmer. And I ask all of my colleagues to join with me in welcoming Viola to her legislature.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone Centre.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and as First Nations and Métis Relations critic, I too would like to join in welcoming Viola Bell to her legislature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens that speaks to living costs which include housing and the major impact that they're having on Saskatchewan's senior citizens, and that more affordable housing options would be of significant help. And the prayer reads:

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.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition calling for wage equity for CBO [community-based organization] workers in Saskatchewan. We all know they get paid significantly less than those in the government sector — some 8 to \$10 less — and this is an important issue because

they're doing work of equal value. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the development and implementation of a multi-year funding plan to ensure that CBO workers achieve wage equity with employees who perform work of equal value in government departments.

Mr. Speaker, these petitioners come from Regina, Battleford, Pilot Butte, Fillmore, Coronach, Lanigan, and Lloydminster. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of rural residents of Saskatchewan who again feel like they're being left behind by this government and are having to deal with the cost burden of providing quality drinking water all on their own. The prayer reads as such:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to financially assist the town of Duck Lake residents for the good of their health and safety due to the exorbitant water rates being forced on them by a government agency, and that this government fulfills its commitment to rural Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I submit these petitions on behalf of the good citizens of Duck Lake, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from The Battlefords.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of a new Saskatchewan Hospital. The petitioners note that Prairie North Regional Health Authority has indicated the construction of a new Saskatchewan Hospital at North Battleford is a priority, and they have committed resources to develop preliminary facility and site plans. Mr. Speaker, the petitioners ask:

... that the Assembly call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to immediately recommit funds and resources for the continued development and construction of a new Saskatchewan Hospital at North Battleford and provide the Prairie North Regional Health Authority with the authority necessary to complete this essential and much-needed project.

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners come from The Battlefords and the constituency of Cut Knife-Turtleford. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to present a petition in support of expansion of the graduate retention program. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately expand the graduate retention program to include master's and Ph.D. graduates.

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

Mr. Speaker, the individuals who signed this petition are students from the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina, as well as a number of health care professionals working in the province who hold graduate degrees. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Clerk.

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — I wish to present a petition for a private Bill on behalf of petitioners from the Stephen and Michelene Worobetz Foundation. The prayer of the petition reads as follows:

Amend An Act to incorporate the Stephen and Michelene Worobetz Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition for a private Bill on behalf of petitioners for The Ancient Order of Melchizedeq, Inc./Hidden Land Institute. The prayer of the petition reads as follows:

Hidden Land Institute wishes to award certificates, diplomas, and confer degrees in religious-centred disciplines, subject to section 6(3) of *The University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995*.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Ronald McDonald House Home Lottery

Ms. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that a new and fully furnished home built in Lakeridge neighbourhood, which is located in my constituency of Regina-Qu'Appelle Valley, this home will be the grand prize in the Ronald McDonald House home lottery. All proceeds of this home lottery will go towards the Ronald McDonald House located in Saskatoon. The lottery home is being sponsored by both the paint company, Benjamin Moore, as well as Tamco Homes.

This home will be profiled in the *Regina HOME Magazine* that will be available this Friday. We applaud the efforts of these companies to help such a worthy and deserving cause.

Mr. Speaker, Ronald McDonald home is an important support organization for families with seriously ill children who are being treated at nearby hospitals. The Ronald McDonald House offers those needy families comfort, warm, compassionate accommodations for a nominal charge while they remain in the same city as their ill children. Having family members nearby can mean so much to a child who is faced with ongoing critical medical treatment.

Ronald McDonald home operates in 12 cities across Canada, and each location is owned and operated by a non-profit organization. While the bulk of the funding of these homes comes from Ronald McDonald House charities, and McDonald's itself, people can donate directly to these houses as well. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate those involved in the Ronald McDonald House home lottery for their hard work, their dedication for a worthy cause. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Regina Citizen Receives Award for Lifetime Commitment

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand today to recognize the 2008 CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] Regina Citizen of the Year, a resident in the fine constituency of Regina Elphinstone-Centre, Beth Ell. The CTV Regina Citizen of the Year award recognizes a citizen's lifetime commitment to their province and its people.

Beth Ell was raised in the farming community of Kelvington. For the past 14 years, she has worked at the Saskatchewan Government Insurance agency, where she has helped to build community by tirelessly volunteering her time with many community service initiatives provided for by SGI and the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union.

In particular, Beth has had a special relationship with Souls Harbour Rescue Mission. I know first-hand that Beth was one of the many people that Gerri Carroll relied on immensely as Souls Harbour went about performing its miracles. To this day, Beth Ell is affectionately known as mom by many of the adults and children at Souls Harbour. Indeed the last time I had a chance to visit with Beth, Mr. Speaker, she was helping to serve Christmas dinner for 1,500. Beth also holds the position of president for the Pasqua Hospital Auxiliary. Working with others, her big heart and helping hands have helped to raise over \$1 million for the Hospitals of Regina Foundation.

Beth Ell's work has touched the lives of thousands of people in Saskatchewan, and this award provides a fitting tribute to a wonderful person. I ask this Assembly to join me in expressing our admiration and appreciation of Beth "Mom" Ell, 2008 CTV Regina Citizen of the Year.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Students Against Drinking and Driving

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the weather improves, the number of people going out socially increases and many may end up drinking and driving home. Mr. Speaker, to help everyone remember the dangers of drinking and driving, March 8 to 14 has been declared Impaired Driving Awareness Week. Not only does drinking and driving have a devastating effect on families and friends of those injured or killed in alcohol-related crashes, but it also increases the cost to society in terms of insurance, health care, and other government services.

According to Students Against Drinking and Driving, alcohol was a factor in 42 fatal accidents in 2005. It represents a 16 per cent decrease from the previous three year of average collisions. That's a good thing — fewer people were injured as a result of alcohol-related crashes. Also in 2005, 670 injuries were recorded; a 70 per cent drop from the previous three-year average of 810.

Mr. Speaker, the number of incidents involving drinking and driving is decreasing, and that's good. However there is still work that needs to be done to ensure the number continues to decrease to the ultimate goal of zero. Mr. Speaker, the slogan, Don't Drink and Drive, can't be said enough, and the Students Against Drinking and Driving is working hard to enforce that slogan into the minds of young people and adults across Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Dr. Louis Poulin Recognized on Retirement

Mr. Furber: — Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, Dr. Louis Poulin has been a physician, medical manager, and senior medical officer with the Prince Albert Parkland Health Region. He's exceedingly well respected in our community and is known as a compassionate and dedicated doctor.

In February Dr. Poulin retired. The Health Region's physicians, staff, and patients, while very happy for him in his retirement, are also sad to see him leave. He was a valued physician and a strong leader in our community.

Over his years in Prince Albert, Dr. Poulin has helped many people and saved many lives, but one in particular stands out for Dr. Poulin. It is a child he called his miracle baby. Dr. Poulin was a young doctor when he examined a mother in the early stages of labour. Although on the surface she seemed to be doing just fine, on what he calls a gut feeling, Dr. Poulin decided to test how the baby was doing. And as it turns out, the baby was in distress. And after emergency surgery was performed, the baby was born seconds before she would have stopped breathing, as the umbilical cord was wrapped around her neck.

Dr. Poulin had the opportunity to watch his miracle baby grow up and eventually delivered one of her babies. Dr. Poulin said his career was filled with similar cases where he felt guided by

a higher power. Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join with me in thanking Dr. Poulin for his years of dedicated service to Prince Albert and area, and in congratulating him on his retirement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Batoche.

Funding for Rural Saskatchewan

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this year's SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention, our government made a major announcement that will benefit rural Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, our government is taking steps to enhance safety on the farm through the reinstatement of SaskPower's farmyard line relocation program. This important program was cancelled in 2004 by the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to provide a rebate for gopher control. In addition we are introducing the Saskatchewan livestock predation program which hires hunters and trappers to control the wild boar and coyote population. This government will significantly enhance the 20 million municipal road program. And, Mr. Speaker, in our upcoming balanced budget, our government will keep another promise to achieve a fair balance for education funding.

Under the NDP [New Democratic Party], Mr. Speaker, rural residents saw their hospitals close, crop insurance premiums go up while benefits went down, roads crumble, and the needs of farmers and ranchers ignored. In contrast, these programs will keep rural residents in their daily lives. They will keep Saskatchewan strong and make our province a better place to live for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Tamara's House

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, in 1991, Tamara's House was formed as a non-profit organization to provide services to women who have survived childhood sexual abuse. The idea for Tamara's House grew out of a meeting in the home of the Saskatoon founder, Dr. Kathy Storrie. A small group of concerned people decided that women who had survived child sexual abuse needed a safe alternative to the psychiatric system to help them deal with the lifelong repercussions of their experiences.

Six years ago, thanks to Frank and Ellen Remai, a home for survivors was opened in Saskatoon Nutana. The home offers survivors short-term shelter, counselling, therapeutic treatments, and educational opportunities, including an annual bursary. Outreach workshops and seminars also provide public education about sexual abuse and the healing process.

Tamara's House is currently funded for four beds by the Social Services ministry. Growing demand, however, in Saskatchewan has resulted in eight residents presently living at Tamara's House. Staff stretches time and resources to assist the increasing numbers of residents because these women simply cannot be turned away in a crisis.

At present, Tamara's House management is communicating with the ministry and preparing a funding proposal to expand beds to accommodate the growing numbers of women turning to Tamara's House for help.

I endorse, Mr. Speaker, the valuable services provided by Tamara's House, and I would urge the government to grant a forthcoming request for expanded funding for Tamara's House.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:15]

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

Liver Health Month

Mr. Bradshaw: — Mr. Speaker, March is Liver Health Month throughout Canada. Being diagnosed with any form of liver disease can be a traumatic and fearful experience for many people. Despite the fact that liver disease is often stereotypically linked to drug and alcohol abuse, in actuality there are over 100 known causes that affect everyone from newborns to mature adults. In some cases factors can range from genetics, obesity, autoimmune disorders, to cancer.

As our population ages, we are facing more chronic illnesses like liver disease than previous generations. But we also are seeing amazing breakthroughs in treatment options. It is critical that we work to shorten our wait-lists so that those who truly need the medical care can promptly receive it.

Our government is working hard to strengthen our health care system and reduce wait times. In November our government launched a much-anticipated patient-first review. In fact, no other province in Canada has undertaken such a system-wide review. Mr. Speaker, it is truly inspirational how communities across Saskatchewan can come together to build awareness and fight this condition — through fundraisers, marathons, and other efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members join in the fight against liver disease by raising awareness in their own communities so that we can work together to combat liver disease.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Graduate Retention Program

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the people of Saskatchewan want the Sask Party government to fix its flawed graduate retention program. Over this past week I've been emailed and phoned by many students and professionals who all agree that the Minister of Advanced Education needs to admit he made a mistake and expand the graduate retention program to include those who earn masters' and Ph.D.s [Doctor of Philosophy]. The Sask Party claims that they are willing to learn from their mistakes. To the minister: when will he admit he made a mistake and that his graduate retention program is flawed and unfair?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, thanks very much for the opportunity to talk about the graduate retention program, the most aggressive youth retention program that there is in Canada — recognized across the country. It makes sure that we're covering people from journeypersons all the way through to the undergraduate completion of their degrees, Mr. Speaker. What we're seeing with the phase-in, Mr. Speaker, is in fact some graduate students are already covered because they were already phased in, Mr. Speaker.

I've had the opportunity to sit down with both deans of graduate studies, and there's no clear consensus, Mr. Speaker, regarding the instrument. So let's look at some objectives. Rather than playing politics, let's look at public policy instruments and that is, how can we best make sure on areas of recruitment, retention, completion, and then succession planning into employment streams and career streaming?

So as we're going through this, Mr. Speaker, certainly not opposed to any additional instruments, but we're making sure that we're going through a very rational, thorough process regarding the appropriate instruments.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Broten: — I'm sure that's very comforting to the students left out in the cold, Mr. Speaker. At a time of global economic uncertainty, many Saskatchewan people are concerned that this Sask Party government is squandering our province's future prosperity, and you can't blame them for fearing that, Mr. Speaker. After all, the Sask Party fails to see the value of encouraging those with masters' and Ph.D.s to remain here in Saskatchewan and contribute to our future economic growth.

To the minister: when will he stop squandering our future prosperity and expand the graduate retention program to include all university students in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for

Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, just I guess in a way of framing this, I'm happy to report that population growth is up over 16,000 people July to July, Mr. Speaker. But to the point, Mr. Speaker, it's one of the reasons that we put in place the tax reductions that we have. And so for a family of four making \$35,000, there's a savings of over \$2,600. The relevance, Mr. Speaker, is these were designed for the intentions of people with low and medium incomes, Mr. Speaker. They're benefiting more from the tax cuts that have been put in place than any previous program that was in place by the previous government.

So as we're helping to address population growth instead of decline, as we're helping to address affordable living, Mr. Speaker, we're also having a rational conversation about what are the best instruments to ensure that we're maximizing public dollars. Mr. Speaker, we've seen additional dollars invested from Ottawa. We're waiting to see what that looks like. Mr. Speaker, there's more work to be done here to be sure, but it's going to be through thorough public policy.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people understand that the Sask Party government is failing them. Unfortunately the minister is oblivious to the effects of his program, so let's try again.

Tax season is fast approaching. Some graduates are certainly going to benefit from the retention program, but many others are starting to see how, with the Sask Party government, they are paying more and getting a whole lot less.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party is shortchanging professors, business grads, speech language pathologists, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, social workers, and clinical psychologists, to name just a few. Many of these professions are in high demand right now in Saskatchewan.

To the minister: can he explain to these desperately needed professionals why they are paying more and getting less under this Sask Party government?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, one of the first questions I began by speaking with both deans is to say, what does the cohort of graduate students actually look like? Who are those that are entering graduate programs within Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? We see some of those that are coming through traditional streams — that is, directly out of their undergraduate degrees. There are others that are coming in mid-professions, as far as making sure they're doing some upgrades and professional development. And then, Mr. Speaker, we see that there are a number of international students.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, some students are already benefiting from the graduate retention program. Is there more work to do? Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is. But we need to better understand what are the instruments that can be maximized.

The federal government's moving forward, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that we're positioned to get more money from Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. But in a sense, what we need to do is make sure that we're maximizing those resources that are already on the table. Not opposed to moving forward, Mr. Speaker. Doing so in a very thorough way that allows for the best public policy instruments to be implemented.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

SaskWater Services

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of SaskWater claimed he wants SaskWater to focus on providing safe, affordable water to families and communities. But he avoided the question of who was going to pay for it.

The Sask Party's got two choices. They can allow SaskWater to pursue industrial customers and find the revenue it needs to keep water rates for families and communities affordable. Or they can make families and communities pay rates that they can't afford and drive the corporation into the ground.

Mr. Speaker, to the member: which is it? Will he allow SaskWater to find the new revenues it needs to keep water rates affordable, or is his real plan to drive SaskWater into the ground?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right in the sense that there are two choices. There's a choice going forward to be responsible, to provide service to Saskatchewan people — something that was articulated very well at the SARM convention as recently as yesterday — communities across the province.

The second choice is to do nothing, as has been done over the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a serious concern going forward. It's a serious, it's a serious and growing concern, something that this government takes very seriously and something that this government will use the Crown corporations to ensure that that service is provided as Saskatchewan people want it, as they deserve it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, everyone agrees that the role of SaskWater is to provide safe and affordable waters to

Saskatchewan families and communities. The question is affordability.

Industrial customers represent two-thirds of the SaskWater annual water sales. Without the revenue those customers bring in, SaskWater is simply not viable. Now the Sask Party's refused to let SaskWater develop new industrial clients. So it's clear where they're going, Mr. Speaker. Over time SaskWater simply won't be able to generate the revenue it needs to remain viable. It won't be able to continue to provide safe, affordable water to Saskatchewan's families and communities.

My question to the minister: what doesn't he understand? Why is he so determined to dry up SaskWater?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, SaskWater has provided both industrial and residential services. On the industrial side they've done it and tried to be on a commercial basis. They've had a small loss over the last number of years.

If the concentration was made on the residential side, and more capital was put in, they might break even; they might make a small profit if that decision was made. But that does not address the real issue here, Mr. Speaker. And members opposite, those that were at SARM, would have heard this in spades — that we have to provide safe and reliable residential water in the municipalities. That's where the real need is. That's where the responsibility for SaskWater lies. That's where we will be concentrating our efforts and making those decisions, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister admitted that change is coming to SaskWater. Change, the minister said, will be "difficult and disconcerting." Yesterday he said also, "Different skill sets might be needed at SaskWater." He wouldn't say how many people with different skill sets might be needed.

To the minister: what is he hiding? How many jobs are going to be lost at SaskWater now that he's changed his plan and won't allow commercial development?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, this speaks to the very fact why the NDP got in trouble over the last 16 years. They did not look at change; they did not face change in the eye and say that we're going to change things to make things better in the province.

Our province has changed, Mr. Speaker. It's changed from when that NDP opposition was in government. We now have the fastest growing economy in the country. We have people moving back to Saskatchewan from Alberta. We have people moving back to Saskatchewan from Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. There's more residences coming. There's more developments around Saskatoon, around Regina. We know from SaskEnergy and SaskPower that there's more hookups in every town and city in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Yes, that enhances the responsibility for Crowns like SaskPower. That necessitates change, and that's what will be done, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, you know the government opposite is proud to talk about infrastructure programs, but we know what their infrastructure programs got Duck Lake — \$66,000 on a \$2.3 million water project. He talks about private service providers, and we know where that got Duck Lake — water bills of over \$160 a month and 11 customers without water service.

The Speaker: — The member may place his question.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best way to provide safe and affordable water to communities and families is to make SaskWater more viable, but they don't want to do that either. To the minister: what is he hiding? Why won't he be straight with the people of Saskatchewan about the Sask Party government's plans for SaskWater's future?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, we're seeing a reoccurring theme here that members opposite are complaining about the costs that . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Minister responsible could respond.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, they're complaining about the costs, but they offer absolutely no solutions. SaskWater, in their agreement with Duck Lake, it was entered into by that administration, Mr. Speaker.

SaskWater's responsibility is to provide safe and reliable water to Saskatchewan residents. That's indeed what they will be doing. SaskWater has an enhanced responsibility. And that's what it will be directing its resources towards. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:30]

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

EZ Finder Phonebooks

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, according to today's newspapers, it appears the people from across the continent are phoning in to complain about this Sask Party government's creative financing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, earlier this week when I asked the Minister of CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] about the process involving the sale of EZ Finder Phonebooks, he said, and I quote, "All prospective purchasers were canvassed."

Well now according to today's paper, Mr. Speaker, that is in fact not the case. Mr. Bruce Howard, CEO [chief executive officer] of User-Friendly Phone Book, says in our papers today "They [being his company] had a very high level of knowledge . . ."

"They [this government] had a . . . high level of knowledge of our interest and our interest was never pursued, never called, nothing."

And get this, Mr. Speaker, what he says:

"When I saw the purchase price, I said . . . Without even knowing the numbers I can guarantee you we would be five (times) . . . [higher]."

Mr. Speaker, five times higher. So my question to the Minister of CIC: why did he report to this House, why did he . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I ask . . . Order. The member has the right to place his question.

Mr. Calvert: — I note a little sensitivity across the way, Mr. Speaker. The question to the Minister of CIC is this: why did he report to this House that all prospective purchasers had been contacted when in fact that they hadn't? And why did they not pursue an opportunity to receive five times more for the EZ Finder Phonebook?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, it's the oldest story in the book — two days after the sale was made, somebody comes along and says they would have paid you more.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing, I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker. Any deal . . .

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Fairview will come to order. The Minister Responsible for Crown Corp.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — I can tell you one thing. Any deal . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The minister may respond.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing. Any deal to get us out of this mess is better than any deal to get us into this mess that those members opposite undertook. \$13.4 million loss, taxpayers' money. 2006, what are the numbers? \$1.9 million loss. 2007, 3.3. 2008, we don't know the exact number for sure, but when the annual report comes out we'll know it; it's in the neighbourhood of \$2 million loss.

Facing SaskTel was the possibility of another \$1 million loss with the Calgary phone book. They came up with the strategic plan, strategic partners, a list of partners, those operating in the very markets that these books are. They were canvassed, they were chosen. An independent evaluation . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The minister's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, let's review. In today's newspapers, it's indicated that conversations between this firm and this government have been going on for a long time. But when it came to the sale, the CEO of this group says, we were never contacted. He knows, he knows the business and he knows what was for sale and he says, I would have gladly paid five times more.

Now what about the deal we did get? Well we apparently got a significant 20 per cent of what we might have got, and we've got what this government said they wouldn't do. And that's an investment in an out-of-province firm. That's against the very policy they promote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear the question needs to be, to the Minister of CIC: why is it you can't even do the wrong thing right?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has demonstrated that he can do the wrong thing and he can do it very well, because they did it time and time and time again.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is fast and loose with the facts. He talks about five times the value, Mr. Speaker. \$950,000 was the cash deal. He says he would have paid five times that amount. Well, Mr. Speaker, that would be \$4.75 million. The value of this deal to SaskTel is \$6.593 million: \$950,000 in cash, \$3.7 million in preferred shares which are almost like a debt instrument, and, Mr. Speaker, \$1.91 million in receivables. \$6.6 million has been rescued from a \$13.4 million loss.

The Speaker: — The minister's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Crown and Government Outsourcing

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is demonstrating his grasp of creative financing. Mr. Speaker, we now know that this government has been less than upfront when it comes to outsourcing in sales. When it came to the question of outsourcing of the email services, even Saskatchewan firms are not invited to participate.

Mr. Speaker, my question now to the Minister of CIC: is he, SaskTel, any other Crown, or his government in total now contemplating any other outsourcing of services?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, we've had this outsourcing debate before and I'd be more than happy to get into it again. Outsourcing is what innovative companies do. And SaskTel is an innovative company. When you're involved in innovation, things become routine and when they become routine, you take that money, you outsource it. You save that money. You take it, and you put it into innovation. You create more jobs and you ensure that you have an innovative, competitive company. That's what SaskTel will do and will continue to do.

Those decisions will be made by the management team, by the board of directors. I will have a chance to review it. But unlike members opposite, politicians won't claim to know more about this than those professionals that are hired to do a job. They do a good job. And if members opposite have any information that says otherwise, I would challenge them to put that on the floor right now.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, for the third time this morning, the minister refuses to answer a very direct question put to him. My direct question is: is he, is the government considering the outsourcing of other services, key components, for instance of SaskTel? Let me even be more direct. Is this government now considering the outsourcing of directory assistance or message relay service?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as it was in 2004, or as it was in 2005 under that government, the option of outsourcing is one option that is looked at and should be looked at in a responsible manner whether it's SaskPower, SaskTel, SaskEnergy, SGI, or any of the Crowns or any business in government or in the private sector, Mr. Speaker. If it makes sense from a business perspective to do it, and that capital can be redeployed to create more jobs and to keep those companies more innovative, of course they'll look at it.

Does the member opposite not want them to do that at all? If he does, I invite him to put that on the public record today, now. And why has it changed between 2004-05 and today?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Government's Performance

Mr. Calvert: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Premier seems to be quite agitated in his seat over there. Mr. Speaker, what we have observed in today's question period is what we have observed throughout the course of this session — a government that is refusing to be upfront with the people of Saskatchewan through this legislature or in other means. Let me just review, Mr. Speaker, for a moment, what we have learned in the course of this session.

The public was not informed about the outsourcing going on at SaskTel. In that process, Saskatchewan firms have been left out of the process. They will not tell us who received the outsourcing for conference calling. They're selling assets without due process. We learned today that we could have got five times more. They can't even do the wrong thing right.

They botched, Mr. Speaker, they botched the enhanced driver's licence. They've had a damning report from the Privacy Commissioner. They've introduced labour legislation again without consulting workers. They refuse to listen to the concerns of the people of Duck Lake. And they do nothing . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I ask the member to place his question.

Mr. Calvert: — The question, Mr. Speaker, and given that they're not even listening to people who are having their water turned off, their power turned off, and their gas turned off, my question is to the Premier. Does he call this good government? Because, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you, the people of Saskatchewan do not.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, let me just thank the hon. member for his question. And in the preamble he made some comments with respect to a discontinuance of service in the Crowns. We need to state it very clearly for the public record, Mr. Speaker, that under his government, when he sat over here and he was the government, cut-offs were almost a third higher than they are this year, Mr. Speaker, under his government. So there's a little duplicity there as the hon. member wants to raise his question.

But the specific question was, are the people of the province of Saskatchewan happy with and well served by the government? Well I think we should ask the people of Saskatchewan how they feel about the largest single-year tax cut in the history of this province. I think we should ask them how they feel about the strongest economy in the Dominion of Canada right here in Saskatchewan. I think we should ask them how they feel about

a government that's reduced the debt by 40 per cent in its first budget year, Mr. Speaker. I think we ought to ask them how they feel about record investments in infrastructure as a stimulus and to deal with a deficit of infrastructure left behind by that government. I think their answer would be, we can always, we can always see improvement but right now we are pleased with the Government of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, it is clear this early in the life of this government, this early in this session, it is clear that this government has now been gripped with an attitude of invincibility — an attitude, Mr. Speaker, that says, we can do anything we want. We do not need to consult with the people of Saskatchewan. We do not need to accept due process. We do not need to listen to the independent officers of this legislature. An air of invincibility that says they can turn their backs . . .

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

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, it's an air of invincibility that makes them believe they can turn their backs on the very people who voted for them — for instance the people of Duck Lake. Mr. Speaker, it's an air of invincibility that thinks they can just turn their backs with disdain on people who are losing their utilities and an air of invincibility that says that we ought to just accept their creative financing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier: between his trips to the airport, will he do something about this?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, again to the preamble from the member for Riversdale, if he was listening carefully to my first answer, I said very clearly that governments can always do better. That is the attitude of this particular government 15 months into office.

The people of Saskatchewan have been able to achieve some pretty amazing things over 15 months. The economy of the province has provided for that, but we have said consistently that we can always strive to do better. And that will continue to be the attitude on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

And we have some momentum to be able to build on, Mr. Speaker, it's true. I can run down the list again in terms of that record of debt reduction, in terms of making life affordable in the province through record increases in things like the senior income assistance program, through low-income tax credit nearly doubling, Mr. Speaker, through low-income housing supplements on the rise, Mr. Speaker. People in the province are sharing in what is unprecedented prosperity for the province. This government's going to work to ensure that that prosperity continues and is shared by all and that this province leads the country as it is today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:45]

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Affordable Housing Investment

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to inform the House about this government's investment of nearly \$30 million in affordable housing.

Expanding the supply of quality affordable housing throughout the province will help ensure a strong economy and a better life for all Saskatchewan people.

Students, seniors, low-income households, and people with intellectual disabilities across Saskatchewan are counting on this government to help address their housing needs. For example, we know that affordable student housing is a priority at the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This nearly \$30 million investment includes \$15 million for the construction of new on-campus residence at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] to provide students there with better access to affordable housing. It will result in the creation of 400 living spaces for students as part of the first new residences to be built on the U of S campus in more than 30 years. Long, long overdue, Mr. Speaker.

The University of Saskatchewan president, Peter MacKinnon, says the new residence will enable the U of S to remain competitive at attracting and retaining students from Saskatchewan and around the world. My colleague, the Hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, tells me that the construction of additional affordable on-campus housing will help students at the U of S succeed in their studies and ultimately stay in Saskatchewan after they graduate. The residence will be built on university-owned land across from the main campus. Construction is expected to begin later this year, Mr. Speaker.

But we're not stopping there. We will also be providing \$12 million for the renovation of 140-unit Milton Heights apartment building in south central Regina. This important initiative will ensure that those units will remain available to low-income seniors and other low-income households in Regina for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that affordable housing is an important issue across Saskatchewan as well as in our two largest cities. That is why nearly \$30 million investment also includes \$2.3 million for 12 affordable housing units for seniors in Prince Albert and 600,000 for improvements to activity centres and group living homes that will benefit people with intellectual disabilities in Maidstone, Yorkton, and Langenburg.

Mr. Speaker, this nearly \$30 million investment amply demonstrates this government's commitment to expand the

supply of quality affordable housing across Saskatchewan. And it's just the beginning. We will continue to work to help address the housing needs of the province's students, seniors, low-income households, and people with intellectual disabilities. It is my privilege in the months ahead to keep the House apprised of this government's ongoing efforts in the area of affordable housing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of her remarks. I want to start by saying I have some questions about the nature of the statement. It's not new information or information . . . We've heard this announced in February.

But I do want to say a couple of things. One is, these are very good, worthwhile projects and we are, and the people of Saskatchewan, very happy to hear about these. I do want to say I do agree with the minister, particularly the student project. The student housing project is long overdue.

And their 15 months . . . And we heard the Premier just talk a few minutes ago about the 15-months work they've done. They've rejected this project already once, and it's now come back and they've accepted it. And of course it was called for in the Merriman report some 10 months ago, and it took them 10 months to get up to speed. And in fact here in this House, as opposition, we've raised numerous questions, petitions. And in fact it was a key part of our recommendation to the Merriman report. So we're very happy to see this.

But I would say this, Mr. Speaker, that the real heroes in this, the real heroes in this — and the opposition . . . or the government may want to shout this down — but I would say the real heroes are the students at the U of S who've worked very hard for many years, the past couple of years, and particularly released this report they called living well, learning well. The student union did so much good work in really articulating the concerns of students and housing. In fact what they've said often, and I have to agree, if it's not affordable, it's not available. And so this government needed to act. They had no choice, but they had to act.

We're very happy about the other projects as well. The senior project in Prince Albert is very worthwhile, and the one about the intellectual disabilities in Langenburg — very worthwhile too. We know, Mr. Speaker, that there's a huge connect, a huge connect between mental health and homelessness. So we hope the minister expands her understanding or view of what the work will be for Sask Housing when it comes to people suffering with mental health issues. We agree totally that those living with intellectual disabilities have huge needs, and we think that's important. But let's expand that to those with mental health as well.

We are, we are very concerned though, Mr. Speaker, that we see more and more of an ad hoc approach to housing in this province. We need to see a real strategy. And we need to see the minister step up to the plate and call for a national housing

strategy, and there needs to be one here in Saskatchewan. We need one that speaks to all the people's needs here in Saskatchewan.

We saw last summer the cut to the NHOP [neighbourhood home ownership program] program, and we call for an immediate reinstatement of the NHOP funding. We also know that Métis and First Nations need support in housing, both on- and off-reserve. And we know that people who are coming to Saskatchewan, recent immigrants, need assistance as well. And, Mr. Speaker, we know, we know this is very true in all our cities in this province. We need support, immediate support, for those who are absolutely homeless. We need that to be a reality right away, and we look forward to it next week.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat, and we appreciate the work that's being done. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

MOTIONS

Division of Bill No. 72

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Speaker, I would ask leave of the Assembly before orders of the day to move a motion that will provide instruction to the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to divide Bill No. 72.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has asked for leave. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies be instructed to divide Bill No. 72, *The Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2008* into two Bills so as to incorporate into separate Bills the provisions of the said Bill relating to:

- a) Enhanced driver licences, being clauses 2 through 9; 11(a) - 11(d) and 12 of the original Bill;
- b) Volunteer firefighting, being clauses 10, 11(e) and 12 of the original Bill; and further;

That the following conditions shall apply to the consideration of the two Bills:

- a) The two Bills shall be numbered and printed separately prior to clause-by-clause consideration, in accordance with rule 157 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*;
- b) The said committee shall report the Bill separately;
- c) The "specified Bill" status and time spent in

consideration of the original Bill shall be applied to the two Bills in accordance with rules 33 through 35 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*.

I so move.

The Speaker: — Will members of the Assembly take the motion put forward by the Government House Leader as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn.

Affordability of Life in Saskatchewan

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate, to move the motion that we're going to be discussing. And I'll read it right off the top before I get into my comments. The motion reads:

That this Assembly recognize the efforts made by the Government of Saskatchewan to keep life affordable for all residents in our province, including taking steps to ensure that our economy continues to grow in this time of global uncertainty [Mr. Speaker].

Mr. Speaker, as I've already indicated, I'm certainly very supportive of the motion and very pleased to be able to move this motion. And it's a motion that speaks to many of the initiatives that we've seen put in place by this government, not only since the beginning of the term of this government, but certainly since the last budget was introduced, announcements that were made by the Premier of the province in October of last year.

And so, Mr. Speaker, in the course of my remarks over the next 15 minutes or so, I'll be looking at both some of the initiatives that I think have helped to make life affordable for the people of Saskatchewan, for the good constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy who continue to honour me with being in this Assembly as a representative, and also initiatives that will ensure, Mr. Speaker, that the economy continues to lead the nation.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we're looking at the issue of affordability, and there's really numerous examples, and I know members after me on this side of the House are going to speak to some of those initiatives in detail and various different initiatives. A few that I want to look at in a little more depth, Mr. Speaker, are those initiatives, those examples that have helped seniors and low-income people, but also, Mr. Speaker, really everybody in this province that is going to benefit — all taxpayers of this province, the families, the children of those

people that file income taxes in the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to begin with really what is being touted by not only this government, Mr. Speaker, but by commentators across the province, columnists, people that follow business, Conference Board of Canada as an example, of what is really being touted as the largest single-year income tax reduction in the province's history. And this was made by the, this was made by the Premier of the province, I believe it was back in late October of last year, Mr. Speaker. And this is very significant, not just for the obvious reasons that everybody wants to see more of their hard-earned money remain in their own pockets for them to decide with.

But, Mr. Speaker, we've seen over the last number of years that, particularly under the tenure of the former government that, you know, simply we were just . . . we were not competitive with our neighbouring provinces, particular in Alberta. I know that was a huge concern in my constituency when I was first becoming involved in politics and running for an election.

And my own family has been, you know, that was a major contributor for my decision to run, was my family situation where I had siblings that left the province. So, Mr. Speaker — and one of the reasons, I think we know, we don't really have to go into this — but was the fact that not only were there jobs available in other provinces, those jobs tended to pay higher. But also the income tax rates were more competitive in other provinces.

And so when you add up all those factors, the good thing is, Mr. Speaker, in the last 15 months, 16 months of this government, we know where the jobs are being created. They are being created in Saskatchewan, and now we have a better situation on the taxes. For an example, Mr. Speaker, a family of four in the province of Saskatchewan can now earn up to \$41,300 before they pay any provincial taxes, Mr. Speaker. And it's significant because it's the highest, the highest level of any province, Mr. Speaker.

And I have, you know, a whole list that I can go down of how a family of four with an income of \$35,000 are now more equitably treated for their taxes. With seniors, single-parent families, and . . . The tax savings this year will be very favourable for them.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing about, the other initiative on this that the government has done is, the people of Saskatchewan will save an additional \$22 million because income tax brackets and personal tax credits will be indexed going forward, Mr. Speaker. So this will benefit every single person in the province who files income taxes.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I am really pleased about that the government has done is, for many years now — and it's always been a bit of a myth that the party opposite has been the party to look after those that are perhaps disadvantaged in the province, of the lower means and lower income in the province, Mr. Speaker — but for years in this province, people on the lowest income levels paid the highest rate of taxes out of any province in Canada, Mr. Speaker. So with the changes that we have put in place, I'm very pleased to know that 80,000 low-income taxpayers will be completely dropped from the tax

rolls in the province of Saskatchewan, and they'll also benefit from a new low-income tax credit, Mr. Speaker.

So that's all very good news for the people of Saskatchewan and makes us clearly competitive with other jurisdictions. And it's, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the right thing to do to put money back in the pockets of those who earn it.

[11:00]

Mr. Speaker, we've also looked at things that we've done to help seniors. There's a high percentage of seniors that live in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency. And I know that working very diligently in our constituency office, my consistency assistant Marcie and I deal with a number of calls from seniors in our constituency. So I was very pleased to see that we have put in place a number of initiatives that will help the seniors of this province, and help them not only retain more of their pension earnings, their retirement earnings that they worked their entire lives to obtain, but helping to keep that in their pockets.

But also some of the supplements that we have announced that will help low-income seniors, particularly increasing — in fact, doubling — the benefits that low-income seniors are able to obtain from the Government of Saskatchewan and, in fact, increasing the number of seniors that will be eligible going forward, Mr. Speaker. So, you know, certainly those on the tax side are very important.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, just from my perspective as a member of this government, and I think members of this government can, you know, share this sentiment that we never know how long we'll be members of this legislature. We'll never know really what kind of impact we'll have on the people that we serve. And surely we don't know how long we'll be government, but I think it'll be for, you know, a number of terms going forward, Mr. Speaker. Certainly my good friend from Regina Rosemont agrees with that sentiment.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's important for a number of reasons, why we're putting money back into people's pockets. First, in a time when all governments are talking about stimulus, this will help to ensure that our economy remains in a good position going forward. I know so far it looks like we're going to be leading all other provinces in 2009-2010 in terms of economic growth. But this is just another way. You know, the Obama administration and governments, jurisdictions across North America are trying to find ways to stimulate their economy. And this is one way we can help to achieve that to make sure that people have more money in their pockets to spend in the economy.

But the other one, Mr. Speaker, I think is more important — certainly from my point of view — is that it's just the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think there's a philosophy on the other side that they believe that, you know, government knows best and the government knows how to spend dollars more effectively than the individual.

And that's something that I just completely disagree with, Mr. Speaker. I think my constituents and my neighbours know. They know whether or not they need to see more money in their pockets to help pay for the kids' hockey registration or, you

know, the fact that utility prices have gone up. So they can make those choices for themselves. They don't need government to say, you know, here's X amount of dollars for you, but we're going to decide how we're going to spend it. And we're going to put it towards, you know, this project. We're going to put it towards this bill that you may have. I think families should make that decision for themselves, Mr. Speaker, and so that's certainly why I support that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on. You know 15 minutes sure goes by pretty quickly in these debates, so I want to move on and talk a little bit about some of the things that we're doing on the second part of the motion to ensure that the economy continues to grow.

One thing, I think the most important thing, that we've done recently — and we've done a lot of things so we have to kind of put it in perspective; this is most recent — is the \$500 million booster shot announced, I believe it was in February, by the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to include money for municipalities — over \$100 million going to all municipalities — which I think was very well received at the SARM convention this week. You know, I think there's been a fairly well-known track record over the last number of years that government hasn't really been that well received at SARM convention, up until about 16 months ago, Mr. Speaker. And I think the reception was pretty warm.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I know that, because it's on per capita, I think it's about \$1.8 million that'll be eligible in Weyburn-Big Muddy. And I know the city of Weyburn has indicated they'll use their approximate million dollars to upgrade Crescent Point coliseum, the hockey rink in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker. And other communities have already talked to me about some of the projects that they want to do.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, I could go through, I do want to go through how has this been received. Because it's one thing, Mr. Speaker, and I'll admit this is one thing for government to think that these are good projects. Obviously we agree with them as the government side of the House. And we agree with the booster shot and the income tax cuts and the record debt reduction — 40 per cent debt reduction. And we certainly will agree with that and are supportive of those things.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's always interesting to see what others are saying. And certainly when the booster shot came out, Mr. Speaker, you know, I could go through all the headlines of the ... what communities were saying, what municipalities were saying about that. But I certainly don't have enough time. I certainly, every time it comes to the office — and all members have the chance to — I look through the newsmagazines that come through from different organizations: the chamber, SARM, SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. They put out different publications.

And certainly the Saskatchewan Chamber was very supportive of the government's moves saying that the Saskatchewan economy is going to hold up well in the midst of economic turmoil in the rest of the world. There's no signs of weakness in

employment or earnings. These are just some of the quotes from . . . that's from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Speaker, just some other headlines. This is from Reuters, "Canadian prairie province dodges recession bullet." And just to quote from the first line, Mr. Speaker: "The world recession has so far stopped short of Saskatchewan, the cold Canadian province that has historically repelled prosperity and young people," Mr. Speaker.

And obviously certainly I know the record of the NDP. That's for sure. Mr. Speaker, Conference Board of Canada, "Provincial Economies Battered by Global Recession." However, it says, "No province is immune to the effects of the global recession, but the momentum in the domestic economies of Saskatchewan . . . will [continue to] cushion the blow . . ."

Mr. Speaker, in the short time I have left, I want to refer to one other thing that I noticed just yesterday. This is from a gentlemen that was brought into the province to speak to different business leaders and CEOs, talking about future trends, that sort of thing, and this is what he put on his blog. And this is an American writer, Mr. Speaker. He says and I want to quote this, "In the past two months I have been travelling across the U.S. and Canada delivering speeches . . ."

He goes on later to say:

Last week I was in Saskatchewan to speak to three different groups of company owners or CEOs and the story was different. As I went around the room asking what business they were in and what their thoughts were concerning the future, I thought I had been dropped into another reality. Comments like "We are in expansion mode". "I am very optimistic about our prospects". "We are up over last year" . . .

Mr. Speaker, he goes on to say:

Wow! I felt that I had be dropped into an entirely different place. As it turns out Saskatchewan's economy was up . . . [while the rest of North America is down].

He goes to say and I quote:

So, with all the doom and gloom we are bombarded with every day we must remember that this is not universal. Saskatchewan clearly is not participating in the global economic meltdown.

And this is from an American analyst, somebody that follows different, you know, trends — economic trends, business trends. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know when he was in Saskatchewan. He must have been watching question period because he certainly saw probably a lot of gloom and doom from the other side. But, Mr. Speaker, at this point I'm going to move the motion. It reads:

That this Assembly recognize the efforts made by the Government of Saskatchewan to keep life affordable for all residents in our province, including taking steps to ensure our economy continues to grow in this time of global uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to hearing all sides in the debate and taking part in the question-answer period, and I so move the motion.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, to ask leave to introduce a guest.

The Speaker: — The member from Athabasca has asked leave to introduce a guest. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. I recognize the member from Athabasca.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome a very special guest to the Assembly. In the east gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a young man by the name of Sean Corrigan.

Sean is from Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sean will be travelling back home with me today. So lucky for Sean, he gets to spend eight hours in a vehicle with me. And I just want to show that Sean's parents are Joey Daigneault who is from Ile-a-la-Crosse, a gifted hockey player; Anna Corrigan, a hard-working woman. But the most important person of all that Sean knows is his grandma or his kohkom whose nickname is noot sigwē gweey. And noot sigwē gweey in Cree means, Mr. Speaker, the great bingo player and great bingo winner.

So I want to take the opportunity to welcome Sean to the Assembly and I look forward to spending the entire day with him as we travel home to the great community of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Affordability of Life in Saskatchewan (continued)

The Speaker: — The motion before the Assembly is the motion presented by the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy. Will the members take it as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to follow the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy. I often seem to get a chance to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The resolution can really be divided into two parts to a certain extent, Mr. Speaker. One, sort of the government slapping itself

on the back for Saskatchewan being an affordable place to live. And secondly, the government taking some credit for whatever might happen over the next few months. And I think the government hopes that whatever that is is good, based on the so-called booster shot that the government has repackaged — \$500 million of money previously announced, Mr. Speaker.

For a number of years, and certainly through I think almost the entire term, if not the entire term of the previous NDP government and leading up to now, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's been a have province. The last time that Saskatchewan was both a have province and the most affordable place to live in Canada was the last year of the former NDP government.

Saskatchewan continues to be a have province, Mr. Speaker, but no longer continues to be the most affordable place to live in Canada. And if the government wants to take credit for the change in affordability, I think they should, Mr. Speaker.

The current Premier, before the last election, raised the concern that the NDP would say that if he was elected Premier, if the members opposite were elected government as they were, winters would be longer in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. In fact I never said that, although I did suspect they would seem longer, Mr. Speaker. And this winter's proved me correct. This winter of Sask Party government has been a long winter. And it's been a cold winter, Mr. Speaker. The coldest in a number of years.

And while the government is slapping themselves on the back for this being an affordable place to live, Mr. Speaker, it has not been the most affordable place to live in Canada any longer, Mr. Speaker, during that long, cold winter.

And when gas was dropping, gas was dropping under \$4 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan were paying twice that — twice that — and are still paying that until this winter ends. And finally relief, Mr. Speaker, finally relief in April. April showers will also bring finally a gas cut.

But, Mr. Speaker, this province has the highest inflation rate in the country. And a large reason for that, a large reason for that are matters within this government's control — particularly utility rates, Mr. Speaker. And the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, as members opposite like to do, talk about a tax cut that we haven't got yet, Mr. Speaker. It won't be delivered till this spring, again with April showers, again finally with a decent adjustment to gas rates, Mr. Speaker. But by the time that tax cut is received, it will have been eaten up. In most households, it will have been eaten up entirely by utility rates, entirely by utility rates, Mr. Speaker. People will have paid in natural gas to heat their homes what they will be getting in the tax cut, Mr. Speaker.

And the government opposite, when we called for rebates like they have in Alberta, like the Saskatchewan Party called for in opposition, the government opposite said nothing. And their silence meant no, Mr. Speaker. And there was no rebates. There were no relief.

That party in opposition promised that if oil went up, gas prices would go down. The Premier, when he gets to government, says that's a gimmick. Well it was a gimmick then in opposition.

And it is typical of the party opposite that they would, as one of their ministers say, say anything in opposition, and do something quite different in government.

The member from Weyburn-Big Muddy spoke about his constituents and what they were looking forward to. I know my constituents were looking forward to — many of them — real property tax relief. That's the message they heard from the Saskatchewan Party.

I have risen in this Chamber a number of times since the election and said, I believe that many people in my constituency who voted for the party opposite feel that they were misled.

[11:15]

There has been no substantial property tax relief. There has been a rebate added of 2 per cent to the NDP rebate of 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That's not what the people of Saskatoon Meewasin think that they were promised by the party opposite, by the current government, Mr. Speaker.

And I actually have said at one point, many months ago, that we don't, we don't, we won't hear from the Reiter report till June. And members opposite yelled across the way: no, no, no, he's going to report in January, he's going to report in January. Well maybe he did, Mr. Speaker, to somebody, but we still haven't heard what's in that report. It is now March; I expect it's being rewritten. And we'll see if we even make June, Mr. Speaker. But in any case there won't be any property tax relief of the substance that my constituents were led to believe, and we're well into the second year of this government.

And again on the affordability, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is now moving on housing but has delayed and dithered in that respect. And so what goes into people's cost of living and to making this an affordable province — which it no longer is, Mr. Speaker — utility rates, gas prices, housing, property taxes, all things that this government has neglected, Mr. Speaker. And of course they're not responsible for the weather, but it's the people of Saskatchewan's bad luck that they would so mismanage natural gas prices when the winter was going to be as cold and long as it has been.

The second part of the resolution has to do with the stimulus program. And it was interesting that the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy first of all attacked government spending saying, well we think people should decide how to spend this money, that government projects aren't the way to do this, to stimulate the economy. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that's what he said. I made a note of it when he said that. And then he goes on to talk about the \$500 million in direct contradiction of what he said.

He did say in those first remarks that the NDP believes that government can spend money better. But the NDP certainly doesn't believe this government can spend money better, Mr. Speaker; we don't believe that. There's been no record that this government knows how to manage its finances or manage the economy, Mr. Speaker.

This \$500 million booster shot, Mr. Speaker, is money that had already been announced, money going to municipalities. It may change the cost share within municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

Municipalities may be paying less; the government will be paying more. That's certainly welcome. We welcome that. The municipalities welcome that. No doubt they do, Mr. Speaker, but are any of these projects new, Mr. Speaker? Were they going to proceed anyways? The funding formula may have changed, but if they're not new projects and if they're not new jobs and they're not new spending, Mr. Speaker, then there is no new stimulus. And for there to be a stimulus, there has to be something new being injected into the economy here other than money that ministers announce again and again and again and again.

What it is essentially in this year, Mr. Speaker, as far as anybody can tell, is merely photo op money. It's photo op money. And you can put stimulus underneath the photograph if you want to, Mr. Speaker, but in fact it'll have no effect on the Saskatchewan economy if it doesn't create more jobs, Mr. Speaker.

And recent developments on the labour front, and legislation from this government suggests that they may not be all that committed to Saskatchewan jobs in any case, Mr. Speaker. Some of this infrastructure money may end up employing people outside the province of Saskatchewan who pay taxes outside the province of Saskatchewan. I don't think the government has thought that out very well, but you can hardly call it a stimulus. It might be a stimulus in Alberta but, Mr. Speaker, that's not our responsibility here. Our responsibility is to work with the people of Saskatchewan, and to make sure that the people of Saskatchewan work, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the stimulus might work as a placebo. But for a placebo to work, Mr. Speaker, people have to believe. People have to believe that the placebo is going to work. And if people are seeing the same \$500 million repackaged now — it's not just infrastructure spending — but now as a stimulus, as a booster shot, Mr. Speaker, they're not going to believe that that stimulus works. And for money in people's pockets to actually work, Mr. Speaker, the money has to be there. And if the tax cut that comes to us in the spring has already gone out the other door, paying the heating bill over the winter, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to work.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're talking about affordability and affordability in Saskatchewan. When we look at affordability, it is defined as that which is affordable, believed to be within one's financial means. With that in consideration, affordability has two components. One, the cost of something, and two, the ability to pay for it by financial means. Therefore we can look at the improving affordability in two ways. One, you can either change price while keeping means constant — the ability to pay — or you can keep price constant while raising everyone's means. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to start with the second first, and then move on to the first one later on in my discussion.

In Saskatchewan we have seen an increase of 16,000 new people working in Saskatchewan this January over last January.

Sixteen thousand people are going to work and earning a paycheque now that weren't that year ago. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country. We have record job numbers. More people are working today in Saskatchewan than had ever worked at any other time. And that is across the spectrum. When you look at the numbers — that is at the high level, the low level, full-time, part-time, First Nations involved in the workforce — on every level, we have succeeded in bringing people into the workforce.

Now, Mr. Speaker, not only are more people working, but they are earning more across the board — 4 per cent increase in wages in this past year. Now we've seen, as was mentioned by the previous speaker, inflation has gone up by 2.6 per cent, but wages have gone up by 4.2 per cent — a real gain. People are getting ahead in this province. They are getting more affordability because they can afford. Mr. Speaker, not only are we seeing more people working, not only are they making more money, but the government is taking less of it back out of their pockets.

In October we saw the largest ever income tax cut in this province's history — not only lowered, but it was retroactive back to the start of the tax year. When we start getting our tax returns back, people are going to get a substantial return — unexpected — and that increases affordability in their lives. They can afford to buy something that in the past they may not have been able to.

Now this contrasts to what the NDP did when they were in power. They were known as tax raisers. They raised the PST [provincial sales tax]. They were as chintzy as putting PST on used cars where the PST had already been paid. They would collect PST multiple times.

Mr. Speaker, when I read stuff like this, I feel like that commercial you see where the accountant's walking around with his hand in the pocket of the people in their everyday lives. That's how I feel the NDP was, following the people of Saskatchewan around plucking dollars and cents out of every transaction, lowering, lowering the affordability in this province. Now, Mr. Speaker, we have created a little more money in the pockets of people of Saskatchewan for the last 18 months.

Another way is property tax. We spelled out in our campaign a very aggressive property tax plan. And we promised that we were going to come out with a long-term solution, and we will, Mr. Speaker, and the people of this province will be the better for it.

Now the NDP in contrast, they talked for a long time about . . . in doing something meaningful about property tax, and that's where it ended. No affordability was gained, just a whole lot of talk.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are people that are no longer engaged in the workforce. There are people who have worked their careers, have retired, are now enjoying retirement. Now affordability for them may not be captured in increased wages. Our government recognized that. We increased the low-income supplement to seniors. Not only did we increase it, we doubled it, and we doubled the number of people that are eligible for it.

So if you've worked your life, you're on retirement, you now have that much more affordability. Double the amount of the subsidy from the government and double the number of people who are on it. What did the NDP do on this? Nothing. For 16 years they never once readjusted this rate. We doubled the amount, and we doubled the amount of people eligible for it, Mr. Speaker.

We also put more money in the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan through the active family tax credit. We also recognized that some people work hard in our province and still don't pay income tax, especially now that we have raised the threshold to a point where a lot of people who are hard-working and don't reach the lowest threshold don't pay income tax, so they weren't affected by our tax cuts. We doubled the low-income tax credit. Mr. Speaker, that is money in the pocket that is increasing affordability on the bottom line for people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

All of these government initiatives have contributed to the increased means for the people of Saskatchewan, making Saskatchewan one of the most affordable places in Canada. I like to call this affordability through prosperity, Mr. Speaker.

Now let's look at the second part of affordability. We've looked at increasing the means. Now let's look at moderating price increases. This is not easily achieved in a province with such growth as ours is experiencing. Our government has worked hard to mitigate the escalating prices normal with this type of growth. An example of where we would often see extreme increases would be housing. So as an example, look at the housing in Saskatchewan as a step to find the burdens of increased cost on people of Saskatchewan.

Again there are two strategies which can be used to avert these cost increases. An economist will tell you the prices of any good is determined by the upward sloping supply curve and where that's intersected by the downward sloping demand curve. Simply put in terms, if the number of housing units stay the same relative to a large number of people moving to Saskatchewan, prices will rise and they will rise dramatically.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the NDP, in 16 years they had a plan to battle this. They were such shrewd managers that they figured out a system. Their system was that if our population stagnated, if our young people moved away, there would be no pressure on the demand side of the equation. Therefore, there was never an affordability issue with housing. As long as you keep exporting our youth, as long as our population doesn't grow, there isn't a need, a pressure on housing.

After watching a generation of our young people leave, Mr. Speaker, our government decided to have a different plan. Our plan was one of hope and optimism, where growth was welcomed, where housing shortages were met by — of all things — housing increases, Mr. Speaker. And the proof is startling.

The proof, Mr. Speaker, is that for 16 years the average housing increases, the average housing starts in Saskatchewan for 16 years was 2,600 houses a year. With the optimism of the 2007 election, a new direction for our province housing . . . our new province started and housing starts exploded. In 2007, 6,000

housing starts; 2008, almost 7,000 housing starts. The Sask Party government has set the table to allow capacity increases to offset the shifting demand curve with a real supply of housing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out this is not a countrywide phenomenon. Our four Western provinces, arguably the most prosperous, all are seeing housing start declines. Saskatchewan, dramatic increases in supply.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out something. When I came to the office this morning, I found an article on the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] website called, "New housing prices drop . . . in Western Canada." Mr. Speaker, I scanned through this because, when you see such growth, it is amazing that you would in fact see housing prices decline. On CBC's website, their article states, Saskatoon, year over year, is going to see "a 2.7 per cent decrease" in housing costs. That is remarkable. And I think that this government should be commended for increasing supply . . . allowing the private sector to increase supply to this benefit.

Now we do recognize that housing prices have escalated. We are proactive. Our government has had several announcements as far as putting public money, putting our money where our mouth is. We have donated 2.9 million to the Juniper Manor project in Saskatoon, 43 units. We have put 3.4 million to the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] Woodland Campus housing project; 1.7 to Columbia Manor. Mr. Speaker, U of S has got more housing.

Mr. Speaker, it is remarkable that we're attacking the supply side. We're investing where we think it needs to be on the public side. And moving forward, we are seeing actual decreases in the price of houses in Saskatchewan, and I commend this government for that.

Mr. Speaker, our government has seen decreases in tax, increases in wages, increases in the number of people working. They're paying less for their housing. Affordability is going the right direction — it is going up. The people of Saskatchewan have more money in their pockets and they will continue, because this government is moving forward.

I am proud of this government. I am proud of our record. We recognize the need for supply. We recognize the need for public assistance. We recognize that in 16 long years our province wasn't done by properly, and we want to change that. People are moving back to Saskatchewan and they will continue. That government is stuck in the past, looking backwards at a time where they thought, if they leave there's more for the rest of us. Our government is looking forward. Our government is saying, come back and make this province better for everyone. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time . . .

[11:30]

The Deputy Speaker: — Time has elapsed, member. I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can hardly believe the words I'm hearing from such an uncaring government — a government that's so indifferent to the needs

of Saskatchewan people. I hear the member for Lloydminster saying that housing starts are up and yet, and yet the government can't point to one single social housing, low-cost housing initiative sod-turning that has been one of their initiatives. And this is after 17 months of Sask Party government, Mr. Speaker.

The 75-minute debate today is around affordability, and I've got nine and a half minutes, roughly, left to talk on this. But I'm astounded that the government is trying to pat its back on affordability. We're in the middle of what I hope and pray is the last cold, cold snap of this long, cold winter. This winter, where the government caused SaskEnergy to raise its natural gas rates October 1, just coming into this cold winter season, a big jump in our natural gas rates, Mr. Speaker. The result of that is that Saskatchewan people paid the most, the highest price for natural gas of any province in all of Canada, full stop, period. All through the coldest winter months. They say, oh no, we were on average, we were pretty good. Yes, that's right.

In the last summer, in the heating . . . in the air conditioning season, the price of natural gas was low enough that on average, we were right in the middle of the pack. But through the cold winter season, the heating season when we use natural gas in quantity, we had the highest rate of natural gas in all of Canada, full stop, period. And I say, shame on them for their mismanagement of that.

Then we have a government patting itself on the back for its gas prices because they announced just the other day, oh we're going to ask for another decrease — they call it — in natural gas prices. And then they had the audacity . . . The minister said, this will bring the natural gas rate to the same level or the lowest level since 2003, when New Democrats were in power— since 2003. Really proud, bringing it down to the level similar to 2003. But there's one big difference between today and 2003, Mr. Speaker. The price that you can buy natural gas from, from a gas producer today is 50 per cent lower than it was in 2003, when they were simply matching the prices that they are now. It's just bizarre. The price should be significantly lower if they hadn't so mismanaged it, but what we expect from an uncaring and indifferent to the needs of Saskatchewan people government. What would we expect from a government that, by its own words, uses creative financing. And they need creative financing. Mr. Speaker, what a shame.

In the past year the most single . . . I'm going to switch a bit to rent. In the past year, the most calls I've got at my constituency office have been dealing with rent increases — rent increases that by all counts have been exorbitant. And you know, Mr. Speaker, we don't have rent control; the government didn't introduce rent control. The government not only didn't introduce rent control, but they can't point to a single sod-turning of social housing that started because of their initiative.

There's been some sod-turning as a result of our several hundred million dollars that we put into social housing in our last year in government. We put the money in — and we knew it takes a little while to turn the sod — but they can't. It's 17 months since they've been elected, and they can't point to a single social housing initiative started under theirs.

So they've done nothing in terms of rent, nothing in terms of social housing. They've driven up the natural gas prices. Then they've applied and had SaskPower apply for a double-digit increase in our power bills at a time, Mr. Speaker, when we're just heading out of the cold winter heating season, and into the summer air conditioning season. So now we'll have a double-digit increase in the SaskPower rates, and what's the justification? Well part of it is, well natural gas prices are high. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's just pure nonsense. It's gobbledygook. It's absolutely not accurate.

The price of natural gas has not been this low for many, many years. The price of coal — worldwide coal — which is the major fuel used by SaskPower to generate its electricity, the price of coal worldwide is also lower now than it has been for several years. All of the inputs, none of them point to up. None of them point to up, other than their need for creative financing and their callous disregard to the needs of Saskatchewan people. Their indifference to people of Saskatchewan, their uncaring with respect to utility prices, Mr. Speaker. And what a shame. We had in place in Saskatchewan — and Saskatchewan people enjoyed it for a number of years — the lowest cost utility bundle in all of Canada. And that was a promise, a solemn promise that the government of the day made, made to the people of Saskatchewan. And we kept it.

And we went in fact even beyond that, because there was a spike in natural gas prices just a few years ago where we actually capped that and made the difference out of the treasury, but all to keep the natural gas prices low for Saskatchewan consumers. We did that. And we paid out on the lowest cost utility bundle a couple of times. And it was an audited lowest cost number. It wasn't just something that we asked people to believe what we in government said was accurate. We had it audited by a national auditing firm to make sure that in fact we were living up not only to the spirit but the intent, and we were in fact delivering on that promise.

Mr. Speaker, one of the parts of this motion talks about taking steps to ensure our economy continues to grow in a time of global uncertainty. Now I want to address that just briefly. Because the government can do some things to help an economy grow, but one of the things that a government can do is to provide some certainty. But this government is doing exactly the opposite, Mr. Speaker.

You ask the people at SaskTel who are fearing about the chunking off of chunks of SaskTel. You ask the people in email services whether they're feeling good about the income tax cuts. You ask the people in conference calling that's been farmed out, out of province. You ask those people that were the telephone conference call delivering the service; you ask them whether they feel real good about the income tax cuts. I don't think the answer would be positive for the government. You ask the people that worked in EZ Finder, the division of DirectWest, the telephone directory, whether they feel real good about their jobs going out of province. And I don't think they'd give much of a darn about an income tax cut.

Affordability and income tax cuts depend on having a decent job. That's what it depends on. But this callous and indifferent Sask Party government don't seem to get it. They just don't seem to care about working women and working men in

Saskatchewan. And that's to their everlasting shame and discredit.

Ask the 90-plus people at SaskWater where the minister says, well change is going to be difficult and hard to take. Ask them what — those 90-plus people headquartered in Moose Jaw and spread around the province, delivering water services to families and communities all across Saskatchewan — you ask them what they think of the income tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. You ask them about affordability. Every one of them is going to say, my affordability depends on me having a paycheque so I can provide for my family, so I can do things good in this community. I can continue to coach minor hockey or minor baseball or I can in some way be a part of my community.

These people are proud, as we all are, of our communities. But to have affordability, you got to have a job. You got to have a decent job. And the job numbers coming out tomorrow, I think are going to start something. I hope I'm wrong, but I think they're going to start something that we don't want to see.

Mr. Speaker, I've never seen a government that got so callous, so uncaring, and so creative with the finance as they say are, as this government now. I have never seen that happen before. Mr. Speaker, this government shouldn't be patting itself on the back for making Saskatchewan the most affordable province in Canada. We were before they were elected. We're not any more.

They should be apologizing to the people of Saskatchewan for their callous, uncaring way. They're driving up utility rates. They're creating uncertainty in the job front. They're doing all of the things that are just dead wrong and are hurtful to the Saskatchewan economy. I sure wish I was wrong. But, Mr. Speaker, they should be apologizing.

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

Mr. LeClerc: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my privilege to rise on the floor today to speak in this debate. And, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting as the pretend socialist party across the way, under their social agenda and affordable reality for the folk of this province, they raised the government by 30 per cent. They raised the child poverty rate to be the first in the nation. They raised the child prostitution rate to be the first in the nation. They raised addiction rates for our youth to be the first in the nation, with the least amount of resources to it. They raised the incarceration rate to be the first — number one — in all of North America. They raised the incarceration rate of adults to number one in Canada. And so they have the nerve to stand on this floor and begin to talk about their record as a pretend socialist party with pretend socialist programming and policy.

Under our government we have, through the social agenda, \$12 million to fund renovations to housing at Milton Heights, a non-profit apartment building operated by regional Lutheran Care Society. We provided over \$29 million in funding for affordable housing projects across this province. They did none of it. \$2.3 million for funding for a 12-unit seniors housing development put forward by the Prince Albert housing society for the Métis community. They didn't do it. Four hundred

thousand for renovations and expansion of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council activity centre in Maidstone . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — There's been some exchanges going across the floor, I hate to cut into debate, but I would ask that I'm having a hard time hearing the speaker. Order. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I guess I've touched a nerve with them. One hundred thousand for renovations to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council activity centre in Yorkton. They didn't do it. One hundred thousand for the purchase of property which operate a group home for individuals with intellectual disabilities and learning impaired. They didn't do it.

This builds on our previous initiatives by our government. In October 2008 our government announced the largest ever investment in the history of the province in support of citizens with intellectual disabilities. The 6.9 million investment over the next four years will address the . . . [inaudible] . . . of 440 individuals in need of special residential and day programs, that grew under their watch.

We expanded the seniors' income plan to include over double the amount of seniors who were previously eligible to receive assistance, and the seniors are now over 18,000. For one senior we gave a supplement of \$1,320; for a couple, \$2,112. They didn't do it. We doubled the amount of seniors who can now receive financial benefits from the plan to a maximum of \$190 a month for a senior single, and \$150 a month per person for couples.

In the senior income plan, we began to add things to the plan: one free eye examination, chiropractor services, reduce deductibles on prescription drugs, home care subsidies, supplement health benefits for those in special care homes, loans and some low-cost devices to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. For 16 years the NDP ignored the needs of low-income seniors by not increasing benefits under the senior income plan at all in 16 years. In our first year of government, we doubled both those benefits for eligible seniors and the number of eligible seniors. We are glad to assist those who have done so much to help build our province, instead of neglect them like the previous government did.

[11:45]

Our government has provided funding to a number of affordable housing complexes across the province including: 2.9 million through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to help fund Juniper Manor in Saskatoon, a three-storey senior residential building featuring 43 new rental units; \$3.4 million last year through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to help fund safe and affordable rental accommodations for 36 low-income families, many of them First Nations who have a family member attending SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert — they didn't do it; supported a new group home in Wynyard for people with intellectual disabilities with an annual commitment by our government for 300,000 in funding — they didn't do it; 1.7 million through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to help fund Columbian Manor in Saskatoon, a 51-unit residence for low-income seniors. Our government is

committed to ensuring that life in Saskatchewan remains affordable for everyone.

The NDP, on the other hand, has a history of neglect when it comes to our housing issues in our province. They conducted a housing task force in the year 2007, but they kept the recommendations secret — a lack of transparency, ingenuous at worst, no transparency, hypocrisy at its highest by the NDP. They only pretend to have a social conscience. Their record speaks on their action.

In support for our low-income people, we raised shelter rates for 6,500 households and social assistance plan and the transitional employment assistance between 32 and \$119 extra a month. As well the shelter rates for the provincial training allowance, increase the TEA [transitional employment allowance] utility benefits by 20 per cent last October to support families on TEA who pay higher utility costs, and the SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] recipients continue to actually have all of their utility costs fully paid.

We increased Saskatchewan rental housing supplement to low-income families between 36 to \$136 a month. We increased the income thresholds by 19 per cent for seniors who rely on social housing programs. We increased the Saskatchewan employment supplement to help lower-to moderate-income working families with the cost of raising children — they didn't do it.

Our government passed *The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act*, which gives Saskatchewan one of the longest notice period for rent increase in the country at six months. Rent increases are now limited to twice per calendar year — they didn't do it.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Saskatchewan remains affordable for our low-income earners. *The Residential Tenancies Act* will help ensure everyone to have an affordable place to live and ensure their rent doesn't grow to get out of control. Shelter rates will increase across Saskatchewan as the province continues to help those most affected by the escalating housing costs. The increase will take effect February 1.

To keep shelter allowances current, the province now indexes rates twice a year, based on a rental market data compiled . . . available through the Canadian mortgage and housing corporation on Saskatchewan communities. They never did this indexing of shelter allowances, which is essential in a growing economy to help low-income people meet the rising costs of affordable housing.

Our government remains committed to ensuring that all Saskatchewan residents benefit from the opportunities and prosperities that we're all experiencing. It is important that our government increases shelter allowances to provide relief to students receiving the provincial training allowance. This increase to help low-income students with rising house costs enables them to focus their attention on their studies and achieving educational goals.

Under the NDP, shelter rates were not increased from 1992 to 2005. Hypocrisy — hypocrisy by a pretend socialist party who did nothing more than grow their government instead of putting into place sound social policy. Shelter rate indexing was one of

the recommendations of the provincial task force on housing affordability.

Beginning July 1 last year, children up to the age of 14 will have their prescription drug costs capped at \$15 per prescription, helping the most needy. This savings will help families save money and ensure their children remain healthy. Another campaign promise made and another campaign promise kept.

Our government has a drug plan that takes care of the most vulnerable by being affordable to the taxpayers. We're committed to providing access to prescription drugs needed by the people of Saskatchewan and is actively expanding the provincial formulary, which was never done under that government. Even when there was drugs that could save people's lives or extend their lives by cancer, they wouldn't do it.

An Hon. Member: — It wasn't done.

Mr. LeClerc: — It wasn't done. You know, I got to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for a pretend socialist party who ran on the policy that we will take care of the poor folk, we will take care of child poverty, we will take care of our folk in our society, those who most need it — they failed at their job. Our government is doing it. I am proud of our track record. We are moving forward to take care of the folk of this province the proper way. I support this amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Member's time has expired. I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to enter into this debate as a community volunteer, a mother of a young child, and as the only female member of this legislature in this debate. Mr. Speaker, any observer of this debate knows that a motion such as this one before us implying that the Sask Party government is actually making any tangible efforts at keeping life affordable for all people is incredibly disingenuous. The Sask Party's claim that they made efforts to make life affordable glosses over the callous cuts already made to social programs, and with those cuts, the people that they have left behind.

Concurrently the impression that this Sask Party government has made meaningful progress in abating the surging cost of living misrepresents the Sask Party government's clear ideological commitment to the expect less, you're on your own, conservative mindset — a mindset that abdicates the role of government and increasingly turns over the capacity and functions of government to unaccountable private interest groups. And it is a mindset that is being put on trial today as the world's nations come to terms with a market system that has left greed and irresponsibility unchecked.

The steps taken by this Sask Party government towards encouraging economic growth is tainted with an ideological commitment, not to share the prosperity with everyday people and build a more fair and caring Saskatchewan, but rather to squander all we have built and could build together as a

province.

Instead the type and tenor of the growth advocated by the Sask Party government comes at the expense of public process, at the expense of public consultation, and at the expense of any notion of transparency. Whether it is the bias and inscrutable nuclear development process that seeks to restrict public debate and facilitate backroom deals, the private esoteric group known as Enterprise Saskatchewan that takes the decision-making of economic development out of the hands of democratically elected legislature and into the hands of an unaccountable group of large corporate friends and managers, or whether it is the insidious privatization agenda already underway in our Crown corporations like SaskTel, the Sask Party government has shown a blatant unwillingness to openly engage the public and fully reveal their ideological agenda with the people of this province.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the motion the Sask Party government puts forward today mocks the struggles of working people. Mr. Speaker, many citizens of our province are facing tough and uncertain times. The Saskatchewan economy has nearly lost 2,000 jobs as a result of layoffs. Companies like Shore Gold, Potash Corporation, Agrium, Cameco, Doepker Industries, StarTek, Babcock in Wilcox, Mosaic and Evraz have laid off workers, who have laid off . . . or have a plan laid out to lay off more workers.

The forestry sector is ailing and shedding jobs on a continual basis. And Saskatchewan's cost of living is surging, recording the highest jump in the price of goods and services in the country. This is not just inevitable or nature taking its course. Yes, Saskatchewan, along with other jurisdictions, is facing the contagion of global economic crisis on an unfolding, historic proportion. Yet at the same time here at home, the Sask Party government imposes utility increases, dithers on the renting crisis in our cities and towns, and refuses to freeze rising tuition costs for post-secondary students. With government-led inflation, it's no wonder why life under a Sask Party government is so expensive.

All these actions describe a government that harbours an ideology that prevents Saskatchewan people from feeling a qualitative sense of a better or affordable life. Instead these actions underscore an ideological commitment to leave people behind during tough times and good times.

When the Sask Party arrived in government, they were unwilling to share with the people of this province, describing the \$2 billion bank account left behind by the NDP as "stark" and shortly thereafter sought to cut programs to help the most vulnerable, including Station 20 West in Saskatoon and the nutritional products program which provided medically necessary, low-cost supplies. Now when the Saskatchewan people face economic insecurity resulting from the same conservative ideology that blatantly jeopardized jobs, caused many to lose their pensions and savings, and rewarded greed and irresponsibility, the Sask Party government is making concerted effort to gouge the people of this province through government imposed hikes.

People are being left behind by a government preoccupied with selling the province, preoccupied with wearing the mantra of

growth, and preoccupied most disturbingly, Mr. Speaker, with an agenda that ultimately seeks to undermine the well-being of this province and its citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it is with sincerity that I speak of the heartbreaking personal challenge of people struggling to get by as a result of the Sask Party ideology. People like Lindsay, a university student in Regina who faces nearly \$600 increase in undergraduate tuition since the Sask Party government lifted the NDP's tuition freeze. Compounding her rising student debt, Lindsay also lives away from home, renting an apartment. As anyone renting in Regina knows, access to affordable, decent rental units is increasingly limited. Lindsay admits to me that she now makes it a habit to avoid checking her mail for fear another notice of a rent increase will appear, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, with a Sask Party government's utility increases, and an ideological commitment to leave renting to the blind market forces, it is almost a foregone conclusion that her rent will continue to rise.

All Lindsay has to do is read the *Leader-Post* article on January 24 of this year to know what the Sask Party government Finance minister has to say about her struggle to pay the bills and obtain a university education. In the article, the Sask Party Finance minister responds to reports that Saskatchewan leads the nation in inflation by saying, "There certainly is more than enough money in peoples' pockets to cover inflation." Or perhaps the Sask Party Finance minister forgot that Lindsay doesn't make enough to benefit from the tax cut provided by the government and, if she did, it has effectively been taken out of her pocket by the surging cost of living.

She is not alone, Mr. Speaker. Kelly, that worked at Melville's recycling facility operated by Rail City Industries, is worried about losing his job. Rail City Industries provides intellectually challenged adults like Kelly a job with the recycling centre. With their recycling program, including an extended recycling program that accepts materials in addition to those accepted by SARCAN, monies left over help to assist the quality-of-life programming for the approximately 53 clients at Rail City. Due to the Sask Party government inaction so far, however, Kelly and his fellow workers are in danger of losing this fulfilling employment at Rail City Industries and elsewhere. Just another story of Sask Party government leaving people behind.

Lindsay and Kelly are also joined by the 11 residents who had their water cut off in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Some of these residents were families with young children, Mr. Speaker. Due to the soaring water bills at over \$160 per month, they are unable to make the necessary payments and have been cut off from water service. There is also another 20 families at risk of not being able to pay the exorbitant water bills.

And on that subject, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said that homework hadn't been done on the issue. Well the Minister for Municipal Affairs unfortunately didn't do his homework either. And let me clarify, Mr. Speaker. He says, "[And] here are [the] irrefutable facts," and talks about the November 14, 2003, emergency boil-water order. Well the information for that, Mr. Minister, to know, is the emergency boil-water order was due to a contamination through testing.

The minister also talks about the November 25, '05

precautionary drinking water advisory which was due to a line break, not water quality. I'll give him that information. June 30, '06 was referred to by the minister as an emergency boil-water order which was again due to a line break. So the minister might want that information. August 14, 2007, there was another precautionary drinking water order. And as stated before, it was due to another line break, not due to water quality.

So the only time the water quality issue was raised was at the time frame when they had the power and the ability to do something about the SaskWater pricing situation, instead of making the residents pay over \$160 a month for their water, which is absolutely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. I will end my remarks by saying that this government needs to do a lot more with the resources they have on behalf of all Saskatchewan residents.

[12:00]

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Sixty-five minutes of debate has ended. Now we are in the 10-minute question-and-answer period. The government has first question. I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member for Regina Coronation Park. With 16,000 more people working in Saskatchewan now than last year, more than ever before, the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and wages have gone up 4.2 per cent — you know, taking into account all the income tax cuts, the low-income supplement, when you take into all of the extra dollars that are in the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan today that weren't 5 years ago, 8 years ago, 12 years ago, my question to that member is: in light of the prosperity, in light of the people doing far better as individuals and collectively, does he really think that another 16-year-period, as we saw in the past, of stagnation would make our province more affordable? I would argue it would be less.

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problem with the Sask Party government is they were born on third and thought they hit a triple. They inherited a red-hot economy where job growth was just phenomenal, and we're very proud of having set the table for that job growth. What we are questioning is what's happened in the last 17 months since they took office. And they have driven the affordability . . . We used to be the most affordable province in all of Canada. We are clearly not that today. Mr. Speaker, I say shame on them.

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In today's *StarPhoenix*, there's a viewpoint expressed by a journalist, and the title of his article is "Extend welcome to post-grads, too." The closing sentence of his article is, I quote, "Well, Mr. Wall, you could start by extending a hand to the thousands of post-grads this new program has left behind."

Clearly for economic growth, we need talented people, people like business grads, physiotherapists, speech language pathologists, nurse practitioners, social workers, and psychologists. My question to the member from Northwest: why is the Sask Party squandering our future prosperity by excluding these many needed professionals?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. LeClerc: — To answer that question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have the most aggressive student retention program in all of Canada. We provide an opportunity over seven years to pay back \$20,000, not only within this province but the other provinces.

We also have the third lowest tuition rate for our postgraduate students. We are working away at looking at what more we can . . . [inaudible] . . . We've lowered the taxes. We've increased student housing. My goodness we are doing so much more in 16 months than they did in 16 years.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — For the member from Coronation Park, when the statistics from Saskatchewan show that we are number one in Canada, in fact probably leading in all of North America, we are no longer a have-not province, CNN [Cable News Network] is even looking at us, how do you come up with the solution that we're losing?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it just gets more and more bizarre from the members opposite talking about Saskatchewan being a have province. We've been a have province for more than a half a dozen years now. That happened under the NDP when we were in government and, mark my words, it's going to be tough to maintain.

Mr. Speaker, the debate was about affordability and we have clearly outlined where they have driven affordability in a wrong-headed way. We've used water. We've used natural gas where they've charged us the highest rates in all of Canada this winter. Power, where they're going to be raising the rates double digit just in time for the air conditioning season. It's a real shame that they can even think they can brag about affordability at this time.

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister for Municipal Affairs said:

. . . we will [help] continue to work with the town [in the

building for . . . the building, help Duck Lake] in applying for the Building Canada fund's second intake, which we expect to begin very shortly.

And he says also:

We are working with them towards making sure that in fact that does take place. There's a second intake of the fund coming up in just a few weeks.

So my question is to the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy and the question is simply this: given that the Building Canada fund doesn't accept projects that have already taken . . . have started under way, and given that the Building Canada fund is a federal program and not a provincial program, I would like to know what the Sask Party government is going to do for the residents of Duck Lake besides filling out a form for a federal program.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for her question and certainly, you know, I appreciate the question. I certainly, you know, recommend that she approach the minister about this topic. I know she doesn't get a whole lot of time in question period so I appreciate she wants to take all the time she can. And you know what's interesting, Mr. Speaker, she mentioned a number of times since, you know, 2003-2004 where it wasn't the water quality issues, it was infrastructure issues. Why, Mr. Speaker?

Because municipalities had been devastated by the previous NDP government when it came to infrastructure. And we're making strides to address that issue, Mr. Speaker. I only wish for those people in Duck Lake and other communities that have these issues, Mr. Speaker, that that member would have talked with this much passion when they were in government, when she actually had a chance to do something for these people, Mr. Speaker. It's sad for those people that she finally finds the passion and the time on this issue when she has no power. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. LeClerc: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a simple question for the member from Regina Coronation Park. The NDP allowed under their watch the shelter rates fall below acceptable targets for affordability. They didn't increase the shelter rates for 12 years while our party increased it twice since we've taken government. The question is, is why are the total caseloads and the numbers of people receiving assistance higher under the NDP government than under our government at this time, although our population has grown, if we are neglecting the well-being of the people of this Saskatchewan province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina

Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — I thank the member for Saskatoon Northwest for that question, Mr. Speaker. And it's interesting that at the time New Democrats formed government in 1991 the social service recipient total was over 30,000 people. And for every month after about six or eight months in government, for every single month for the rest of the 16 years we were in power, the total number of people receiving social service benefits diminished. Some months it was by six or eight, sometimes it was by 20.

Mr. Speaker, we did that. We have a proud history of helping give people a hand up; helping with job training; helping move people into independence wherever it was possible. And in areas where it isn't possible, then you provide the assistance that's needed. We have a very, very proud record. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Lloydminster. Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the member from Lloydminster, a very simple question. Does he believe that his constituents and the people of Saskatchewan should pay more for their natural gas — more for their natural gas, Mr. Speaker — than what the government buys it for? And should he allow his own government to gouge the taxpayers of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Mr. McMillan: — Mr. Speaker, the members of my riding and the people of Saskatchewan as a whole have been well served by SaskEnergy over the long term. They buy gas. They use the tools to spread prices over the long term, Mr. Speaker. And that member knows very well that, when you look at the efforts made, that the Saskatchewan users of natural gas have had the advantage of SaskEnergy. And they will continue under this government to have that advantage moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the time remaining, I have a question for the member from Walsh Acres, Regina Walsh Acres. Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP seem to feel that they know better than the experts, those that buy commodities — natural gas in this case. And they knew which way things were going, Mr. Speaker.

I would ask that member, surely if they would know, you know, last fall which way the market was going, she would have made a killing on the commodity market trading. So in the foresight that they have, what's the stock market going to do in the next six months?

The Deputy Speaker: — The time has elapsed for 75-minute debate. We're under main motion.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

SECOND READINGS

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

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my remarks I will be moving a motion that, in fact, to move second reading of *The Reporting of Federal Transfers Act*. But before doing so, I'd like to make a number of explanatory comments about the Bill that we are currently considering.

Mr. Speaker, the full title of the Bill that we are considering is *An Act respecting the determining, reporting and reviewing of all Federal Government payments made to each provincial government in Canada*.

Mr. Speaker, I might say as a general principle the more informed we, members of the Legislative Assembly, we, the people of Saskatchewan, more informed we are about what is actually taking place in government, what actually happens in government, the better able we — the public, the members of the Legislative Assembly — are in a position to judge the performance of the government. That might seem like a statement that need not be said, but it bears repeating that the more informed we are about what the government's actually doing, the better able we are then to judge the performance of the government.

Reporting of government activities, finances, results, is a long-held tradition. It's a characteristic of governments that operate in a democracy. It's given that if you operate in a democratic system, if the public is to be informed and to make an informed choice about the government, the opposition is to hold that government accountable in a democratic system. Then it follows that people need to be aware about what is taking place in government. And so over the years, over the, I guess, centuries, our system has evolved so that there are always improvements in the information that is provided to members of the Legislative Assembly, members of parliament, and of course to the public. So it's a long-held tradition that government activities shall be reported on.

You know, how can governments be judged fairly if there's no reporting on what governments actually do? And then how can governments be held accountable if there's no information on what it is that governments have been up to? That's why in our system, governments are mandated — not just expected but mandated — required to provide reports on many topics.

In fact there is in our Assembly, and I judge probably in other legislative assemblies and parliaments, there's an Act called *The Tabling of Documents Act*. It's an Act which sets forth how government documents must be tabled and when. Because there are many reporting entities within government that are required to provide annual reports, required to provide financial reports,

required to provide reports on special activities, required to report on virtually everything that government is doing.

And therefore we have an Act called *The Tabling of Documents Act* to provide some framework as to when and how these Acts will be, in fact, tabled with the Legislative Assembly — in fact many of them I think are, in fact, tabled with your officer. So there is then some framework for this.

[12:15]

But it just goes to show for the people of Saskatchewan that there's a great deal of information that comes from the government, is expected to be provided — not just expected, but mandated to be required to be made public so that the public is then in a position to look at that — and then to come to some conclusion as to whether the government is doing things they want the government to do, and therefore hold them accountable. And also to inform them in terms of their choices in future elections.

That's the theory and that's how it's supposed to work. And in the main, it is working that way. We have seen improvements over the years in reporting to the Legislative Assembly and to the public. We certainly had great challenges back in the 1980s with respect to tabling of documents, and I'll get into that in a minute. I might say that, when it comes to reporting, that financial reports are especially significant.

A primary function of all of us, members of the Legislative Assembly, is to consider the government's annual request for funds in its budget and its detailed estimates, so that the government can then be provided these funds to, in fact, run the government. It's not a matter of government spending money without having the approval of the Legislative Assembly. In our system, that's a fundamental principle and the public will know that, if a government is defeated on a vote having to do with the budget, it's generally held that that government then lacks the confidence of the Assembly of parliament and therefore triggers an election, because there is no confidence.

We saw of course a lot of discussion about that last fall in Ottawa when the federal Finance minister put forward a fiscal update to talk about the government's finances and challenges and going forward. And that fiscal update was not accepted by the opposition parties, and of course we all know there was a great deal of talk about that it might trigger an election, an alternative to an election, might be a coalition of opposition parties who then might be called upon to govern. That's all been sorted out. But again, the point I wanted to make is that it's a fundamental principle in our system that it's the parliament or the legislature that is called upon to approve the request from the government for funds to run the government for the coming year. And that's a given in our system, a primary function of the Legislative Assembly.

We have other functions of course such as passing legislation, whether it's Bills being proposed — in the main I would say Bills that are proposed — by the government to expedite the delivery of programs for people in the province, to update legislation with respect to regulations that affect people. Any number of things, reasons that legislation is put forward, and the opposition from time to time will also put forward

legislation. But no change can be made to legislation again without that change being approved by the Legislative Assembly.

It goes further than that, as you know, Mr. Speaker, that it's not just legislation. But there is also regulations that come out of legislation, and then there's a further review mechanism of the Legislative Assembly to ensure that those regulations are in keeping with the principles of the legislation as first put forward. So the question here is, how can MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] judge whether the government's request is reasonable if they are not informed about what has taken place in the past?

And again this is no small issue for MLAs. There have been major legislative battles on this principle of reporting and accountability in Saskatchewan's legislative history. All of us will recall in the 1980s where there seemed to be a breakdown in the principle of reporting and accounting, and a government hiding behind lack of clear, specific direction in terms of what needed to be done. And then contrary to what had been the practice, decided to start a new practice of not reporting, not providing information or doing so at a very late date.

It's also held that if you're called upon to judge the government and you want to do so based on results from the past, then the information that you get should be relevant information. It shouldn't be information that's many years out of date and therefore is of little use in terms of holding the government accountable for what it's asking from you today.

So that was one of the issues in the 1980s where government said, well you know, there's a loophole in legislation that really doesn't address the question about when it is that information should be provided, never mind what the practice had been and how reasonable people would interpret that. We take a different interpretation and therefore we're going to drag our feet. We're not going to provide information in a timely fashion. And we all know that that was a major battle in the 1980s in Saskatchewan. It went so far as court cases being . . . or it being initiated against the government in terms of ensuring that they would be providing information in a timely matter.

I think in that particular case it had to do with the public accounts. The public accounts is in fact the books of the province for a completed fiscal year. The Devine government at that time said with respect to certain public accounts, oh yes, we have the public accounts, but the legislation doesn't say we have to provide it to the public and to the Legislative Assembly by any given date. It says as soon as practicable. So that's a subjective interpretation as to when we can provide it and therefore decided to sit on it for months and months and months, so that by the time you do get the information, it's out of date and is not really that relevant in helping you to judge the government on a go-forward basis.

Now that has changed, Mr. Speaker. There was a change in government in 1991. One of the first things the government did was to make amendments to *The Tabling of Documents Act* to ensure that legislation would be provided in a timely manner; specified that documents needed to be tabled with you as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, so that you could then in turn provide these to the members; and also was very specific

about which areas that these reports should be coming from.

The quality of information is also an issue of course for the members of the Legislative Assembly. You know, there are reports and there are reports. And a government agency can take very complex information, present it in a way that makes it impossible for anyone, let alone members of the Legislative Assembly, to understand what exactly it is that government agency was doing. So the accuracy of the information, what it covers, is — or the quality of information — is also a major issue. That particular issue is probably best illustrated by the debate in Saskatchewan, and a debate that was also on the floor of the Legislative Assembly with respect to summary financial information.

In the 1980s the government took the position that it did not want to provide a broad overview of all of the financial activities of government, more than simply the monies that the government received from the Legislative Assembly to run the highway system, social services, education, and health. But also the question of the activities in the Crown corporations and other government entities not covered by the so-called General Revenue Fund that funds straight-line government ministries, but these other agencies and Crowns.

Government didn't provide an overview of all of this information so that you could look at it and then come to some conclusion about the overall health of government. Because in those days the government was undertaking activities in the Crowns that rightfully should have been reported in straight-line government departments, but they chose to hide them in the Crowns so that there was no overarching report of all of government's activities that would then lead to some understanding by members of the Legislative Assembly and the public as to the financial health of the government — information that would have been well received in those days, given the record of the government of the day.

Now of course the summary financial statements are included in the public accounts so that the information can be reviewed by the public, by members of the Legislative Assembly. And I might let people know that are watching this that, if they care to see the public accounts of Saskatchewan, that these can be accessed through the government's website which is www.gov.sk.ca, and you follow the links to Department of Finance. You'll ultimately get to links that get you in the direction of the public accounts of Saskatchewan, which again are the books of the provincial government for the preceding fiscal year.

One of the other areas of accountability that has been improved tremendously over time is the review of the financial information from the provincial government and also reports of the Provincial Auditor by the Public Accounts Committee of Saskatchewan. This is a review mechanism whereby a committee of the Legislative Assembly reviews the financial documents, then provides a report to the Legislative Assembly, along with any recommendations that they might have, to enable the Legislative Assembly to have greater confidence in the financial reports and issues that have been raised.

This is a committee that has also seen major changes over time, all heading in the direction of greater accountability, better

reporting, more timely information. I remember in the 1980s where there was a time where government members were actually filibustering their own Public Accounts Committee to delay the Public Accounts Committee getting to a more current year in its consideration. So that is a committee that was well behind the times. But today of course the Public Accounts Committee, the attitude has changed. The members work more co-operatively. And in fact the Public Accounts Committee, I think, of today is totally current in its consideration of government departments. That's a tremendous change from what has taken place in the past.

There's other changes, of course. In addition to the Public Accounts Committee having a member of the opposition as the Chair of the committee, the committee is now also fully engaged when it comes to the issue of selecting a Provincial Auditor. Years ago, in the 1980s, the legislation did not really provide for any involvement on the part of the Public Accounts Committee when it came to appointing a Provincial Auditor. That is something that the government drove. That's government's agenda that came into play, and the committee had little or no say in that process.

Now, of course, the Public Accounts Committee plays a major role in the appointment of the Provincial Auditor — and I might say too, a major role in the budget for the Provincial Auditor. Because the Provincial Auditor, as an independent member of the Legislative Assembly, ought not to get its funds from the government, per se, ought to be a separate process for determining what budget the Provincial Auditor needs. And of course we now have that process in place in Saskatchewan.

The Bill before us, in short, seeks to inform the public. And what exactly is it proposing to inform the public about? It's to inform the public about transfers from the federal government as compared to transfers to other provincial governments for each category of transfer. What are these categories, Mr. Speaker?

[12:30]

First of all, I might do an overview that in Canada we are a federation. That is to say, not only is there a national government, but there are also provinces with provincial governments. Each area of government has its own jurisdiction and areas of responsibility that set out initially in the BNA [British North America] Act, I suppose, that formed the basis for the creation of Canada. And it stipulated that Ottawa had certain responsibilities; the provinces have certain responsibilities. For example we all know that the post office, as an example, is a federal responsibility, federal institution, federal organization. But health care, on the other hand, is a provincial responsibility. Education is a provincial responsibility. Highways is a provincial responsibility. Social services is a provincial responsibility.

But there are other federal responsibilities. And so in this country we've arrived at a point where it would be helpful to the provinces to have transfers to the provinces from the federal government to assist the provinces in meeting their jurisdictional obligations, their constitutional obligations to provide those services that I talked about — health, social services, education, highways, and the like — because the

provinces, or at least some of the provinces lack the fiscal capacity. They simply don't have the money to provide those programs in a reasonable way unless there is some federal transfer to assist them to do so.

These programs, well there are many of these programs. All of them are subject to Acts of federal parliament. Federal parliament and the government can't just say one day, well we're going to give arbitrarily a bunch of money to Saskatchewan or arbitrarily a bunch of money to Newfoundland Labrador. We don't have to worry about where it comes from. We just give them the money. But they can't do that. Federal parliament, the federal government is not unlike our own government. Government can't spend money unless that's been approved, in their case by the parliament. And all the monies that are expended by the federal government have to subsequently be reported in their public accounts.

But some of the areas in which funds are transferred to the provinces are areas such as the Canada Health Transfer, obviously as it implies, funds to the provinces to assist provinces with health care; the Canada Social Transfer to assist provinces with social programming, and I think to some extent post-secondary; health reform transfers, a special health transfer; a wait times reduction transfer, and again a special, federal initiative to provide funds to the provinces to assist the provinces to reduce waiting times in their health care system; early learning and child care transfers where the federal government transfers funds to the provinces to assist them — as the Act would indicate — to assist them in areas of early learning and child care; and there are many . . . Well I think that's in the main, the areas in which the federal government transfers funds to the provinces for programs that are being provided by the provinces.

There are of course some other catch-all transfers that the federal government is in a position to make *ex gratia* payments for something that isn't covered by an Act and so on, but would be provided for in the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*. And again, all of these transfers have to be reported by the federal government to the Parliament of Canada and to the people of Canada. So again, what we're talking about is how to account for the transfers received by the Government of Saskatchewan, the people of Saskatchewan, as compared to other governments in Canada, or people, Canadians in other provincial jurisdictions. So there is a long list of these.

I might by way of explanation just point out that in addition to providing provinces with funds to help them to — as I indicated — to assist them in areas such as health care, education, social programs, these are transfers that are done in the main on a per capita basis. So depending on your population, this is how much money you get and therefore Saskatchewan would receive the same as — on a per capita basis — as Ontario which receives the same as Newfoundland-Labrador, the same on a per capita basis. But there are other transfers that the federal government does and the main transfer here is one called equalization.

The theory underlying equalization is that even though you assist the provinces to help them to deliver certain programs, say in health care, it may well be that that province really doesn't have the fiscal capacity to generate the revenues to hold

up their share of those health care expenditures. And in order to do so, if they were to provide those funds to their health care system, their issue would be is that they would have to tax themselves at such a high level that their jurisdiction then would become, in the main, uncompetitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and would cause a massive migration from those areas to other provinces where the tax rates are much lower.

So the idea is that, not only should provinces be in a position to provide relatively comparable services in each province, but they also ought to be able to do that at reasonably comparable tax rates. The idea here again is that, in addition to being provinces each with our own challenges in areas of provincial jurisdiction, we're also Canadians. And there should be some expectations of Canadians that when we move from one part of Canada to another part of Canada, that we are in a position to see relatively comparable programs in the jurisdiction we're moving to as compared to the jurisdiction we came from.

So that if a family moves to Regina from Corner Brook, Newfoundland, they then have some expectation that the school system is not going to be hugely dissimilar in Regina than what it is in Corner Brook. That their child won't be put back in the school system because Corner Brook's school system didn't provide what the school system here is providing or that the child is advanced because our school system is inferior.

You can't make a direct comparison, because again it's provincial jurisdiction, but the idea is that a Canadian should be able to expect to receive comparable services no matter where they go in Canada. And this is in the area of health or education. Comparable services, and to have those provided without being charged extraordinary taxes to pay for that because again, what would happen is then people would move from one part of the country to another seeking the lower tax jurisdictions.

The Bill that I'm putting forward would provide the breakdown of what dollars Saskatchewan receives under each category that I talked about — the early learning and early childhood intervention, the health care transfers and so on, as compared to other provinces. It's not just the global amounts.

The global amounts is in fact being reported now by the Provincial Auditor in the volume 2 of his report every year. The Provincial Auditor has a chapter on vulnerability and I'll explain that in a sec. But for those members of the public that want to see the auditor's report, they can go to www.auditor.sk.ca and follow the links there to see volume 2 of the auditor's 2008 report.

And there, on page 15, there's a chapter on vulnerability, which "is the degree to which a government is dependent upon, and thus, vulnerable to sources of revenue outside of its control or influence." And "Looking for trends in federal transfers provides insight into a government's dependency on outside revenue."

This is no small issue for some jurisdictions — less of an issue for Saskatchewan these days, but no small issue for Canadians in some provinces.

This is information, as I said, that compares the total amounts,

the global amounts received by Saskatchewan on a historical basis. Also does an analysis of the amount received from the federal government as a percentage of our own-source revenues — such as income tax that we receive in Saskatchewan from people that live here, sales taxes, corporation taxes, and so on — to again give some insight as to the extent to which we depend on other jurisdictions.

And finally the auditor also does a reporting of the transfers that are received by each of the provinces. And that shows that Saskatchewan was the third lowest of the 10 provinces for reliance on federal transfers. The lowest was Alberta and Ontario and given what's taken place in the economy, that may well change, Mr. Speaker.

Very high in terms of receiving federal transfers were PEI [Prince Edward Island], some 62 per cent. Or the federal government transfers represented 62 per cent of their own-source revenues whereas in Saskatchewan it was about 19 per cent. So relatively speaking, their budgets have three times as much money from the federal government as is the case for Saskatchewan. And most of that, of course, is for equalization as opposed to straight-line per capita transfer, because on a per capita basis it's pretty much similar.

Again this information is publicly accessible. The Provincial Auditor does provide this information. But again it's on a global basis and not on a basis of this federal government program and what is received by each province; that federal government program, what is received by each province; but the total amount that is received by the province. And that's helpful in terms of the issue the Provincial Auditor raises when it comes to vulnerability, total amount that we are dependent on the federal government for, our revenues, but it doesn't deal with the issue that I think we need to get at and which I will explain further.

I might say that the provincial government provides information, of course, on the funding that's received from the federal government. They do a breakdown in volume 2 of the Public Accounts and shows the actual amount received for each ministry from the federal government. And so that is public information. But the provincial government does not do a comparison, does not do a comparison with what is received by other provincial governments for these areas. And that is what this Bill is trying to get at, Mr. Speaker.

This is information that is available in the public accounts of Canada, the books of the federal government. Just like in Saskatchewan, it's expected the federal government will, at the end of a fiscal year, publish its books in great detail about all of the funds that they expended. Every cent and where it's gone to must be outlined in those public accounts. And those expenditures by the federal government, revenues in this case by provincial government, is reported in their public accounts — every nickel that's spent by the federal government.

And it's no major undertaking, in my view, for provincial Finance officials who probably know this information anyway, it's no major undertaking for provincial Department of Finance personnel to review the federal public accounts, get the information, and to present it in a way that's understandable for members of the Legislative Assembly and for the public, so that

we can then understand what it is that Saskatchewan receives from the federal government as compared to other provincial jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker. In fact I don't they even have to read books. I think they do all this stuff electronically now, and so therefore I don't think that it's any major challenge. And given what I know about the competence and the abilities of people in the Department of Finance, I feel very safe in saying that this is no major undertaking or any major challenge for our provincial Finance officials.

[12:45]

Why this Bill at this time, Mr. Speaker? In a word, equalization. And you know, the time is always right, I think, to put forward legislation that improves reporting and the information that flows to the public and members of the Legislative Assembly and thereby improves accountability. But it's no secret that, in this particular case, this Bill at this time is prompted by the issue of equalization.

Equalization, if I could, not only do provincial governments receive per capita transfers from the federal government to assist them with programs in certain areas such as health and the like — and therefore all provinces receive about the same amount of money on a per capita basis, as might be expected — but again the federal government and the provinces have taken a position over time, as do many other federations in the world, take the position that you can have areas of the country that are less able to generate revenues than other areas of the country.

And we've seen we have a great deal of manufacturing might in Ontario, as an example, as compared to Saskatchewan. Some jurisdictions — Prince Edward Island — had very little in the way of capacity to generate their own revenues. And so this country has landed at a point where, in addition to providing provincial governments with per capita transfers to help them with specific areas that are provincial responsibilities, such as health and education, federal government should also provide some equalizing component to enable some provinces to deal with the challenge of not having the fiscal capacity to provide for programs on a roughly comparable basis when it comes to taxing themselves. And again, as I said, this is the case in other jurisdictions.

It's similar to what we do in Saskatchewan with respect to school boards. We have a number of school boards. Not only do we give the school boards money on a per capita basis, but we also look at the ability of those school boards to generate revenue, in this case on the basis of assessed property values in those school board areas. And if there is a school board that had very low ability to generate revenues from properties in that area, then we give them additional funds to get them up to some level of equality with other school boards.

And so this is a principle and a concept that's been accepted in Canada, is accepted internally in Saskatchewan, is accepted by other jurisdictions around the world — although there may be variations in terms of how they play it out. But again it's the issue of equalization, and specifically the issue of the treatment of resource revenues in equalization.

As I explained, equalization depends on the strength of your economy in a particular jurisdiction and your ability to generate

revenues to pay for your own programs — in addition to funding that you get on a per capita basis from the federal government — and that some provinces have a very weak ability to generate those revenues. Other provinces have a stronger ability to generate those revenues. The question is one of definition: what constitutes revenues? And in this particular case the battle is all about the revenues that come from non-renewable resource revenues.

Initially when equalization was set up in this country, the provinces, the federal government took the position that you ought not to count non-renewable resource revenues because it might be a revenue you get today but it won't be there tomorrow, and therefore should not be included in equalization. And therefore we had the scenario of, years ago in the '50s and '60s, at a time that resource revenues for Alberta were ramping up mightily with all the play that they saw in oil in those years, but continued to receive equalization from the federal government. So Alberta, for a period of time, not only were they getting lots of money from the oil industry that was ramping up in their area, but they were also receiving equalization from Canada.

There's changes that have been made, and then resource revenues were dropped from equalization. And that's been a bone of contention for Saskatchewan over many years, because there's a sense here that at some point the resources run out — and if you haven't been able to take the revenue from that to reinvest it in your province to broaden and strengthen your economy, you might be in a position in some future time where your non-renewable resources are no longer renewable and have run out, that you don't have the dollars to do that. And then you're back in equalization in a major way.

So the issue for us is one of the treatment of non-renewable resource revenues in equalization. We had a slight — not a slight but a major — divergence from this principle that these resource revenues should not be included, in the 1980s, when the prime minister of the day, Brian Mulroney, struck a deal with Nova Scotia. And Newfoundland and Labrador that said to them, you know, if you generate revenues from non-renewable resource revenue sources such as oil and natural gas, we're not going to include that in our equalization payments to a certain extent.

In the early, I guess probably about 2004, with the publication of a report by a Saskatchewan expatriate by the name of Thomas Courchene who is a professor at Queen's University, he published a report called "Confiscatory Equalization." This led to questions about resource revenues and the extent to which these are being considered by the federal government in determining equalization.

We found out the federal government was giving us less than we were entitled to, but what it did was to make this a public issue as opposed to an issue that was simply dealt with by Finance ministers at their tables. What we had then was a public issue. We asked the federal government of the day, the Liberal government of Paul Martin, to address that and to provide for Saskatchewan what they did for those Atlantic provinces. We know the answer. Paul Martin and the Liberal government said, no way; we're not going to do that. We're not going to treat you the same as Newfoundland-Labrador and Nova Scotia. In fact

we're going to give them an even more generous treatment under the equalization program and you, Saskatchewan, are left out in the cold.

Then of course we know that Mr. Martin lost an election, but not before this program was put into place for those Atlantic provinces. And then we had another federal election, and the Conservatives led by Stephen Harper campaigned in Saskatchewan to say, we are going to exclude non-renewable resource revenues from calculating your equalization entitlement — full stop, period. And we all know how that story ended by Stephen Harper walking away from the people of Saskatchewan essentially saying, you know, that's just stuff I say to get your votes. It's not something I want to deliver on, and let's move on to another issue.

Of course we had in those days, a great deal of public debate about that, but the unmistakable conclusion here for the people of Saskatchewan is that they've been had — had by Stephen Harper, had by the Conservatives federally, had by a group that said one thing during the election, and no small thing that they were saying. What it was being calculated as was, this change in equalization as promised by Stephen Harper, would mean \$800 million additionally for the people of Saskatchewan. What does that mean exactly?

Well our budget in those days were probably in the area of about \$8 billion, so \$800 million would roughly be a 10 per cent boost in revenue on an ongoing basis from the federal government. And any person that's in this Legislative Assembly, and especially the Minister of Finance, would tell you that \$800 million a year on an ongoing basis is no small amount of change. It's a major figure. It would be immensely helpful. It would help Saskatchewan to do exactly what we need to do, and that is to strengthen, to broaden our economy so that at some point Saskatchewan will be a contributing province when it comes to equalization in this country without having to rely on non-renewable resource revenues.

But again we know what happened. It was a broken promise by Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, you know. And it wasn't as if they were promising something that had all kinds of fine print and italics and what have you. There was no qualification. It was a bold statement about, we are going to remove non-renewable resource revenues when it comes to calculating your equalization entitlement in Saskatchewan, as for all other provinces that are currently being treated in that way — full stop, period, no equivocation, none whatsoever. People of Saskatchewan expected to receive for their provincial government \$800 million a year, \$800 million a year which could do all kinds of things in terms of our competitive with other jurisdictions. But Stephen Harper and his Conservatives broke that province.

So now the question is, how did this relate to the Bill and how does that relate to the government opposite? Well when Stephen Harper was in opposition and dreaming up these things to say, we still had the Paul Martin government. And the leader of the Saskatchewan Party, the now Premier, took the position that the Saskatchewan government was right, that we should be fighting to improve the equalization program, in fact pushing us to improve the way in which we were attacking Ottawa to get the funds that we felt we deserved, especially given the deal that

had been provided to Newfoundland Labrador and Nova Scotia. This was a party that was very hard on this particular question to move the provincial government to get more from the federal government.

When the Harper government decided that it was going to break its promise, it was not going to live up to the commitment that they made to the people of Saskatchewan, then the provincial government took the point of view that we would launch a court challenge to be on this issue in this matter with the federal government. We took steps to begin to define the details of that court challenge and to then take it to the courts, which would've been the next step, to challenge the federal government. We felt there was reasonable grounds, based on initial analysis by legal and constitutional experts, as to our ability to win that court case.

And I might say that if you win a court case like that, of course you can't take the sheriff and get the money from the federal government, but experience shows in Confederation that if the federal government loses a case like that, they eventually do make good on what the courts say that they should be doing.

So what happened is that, of course, following that, although the Sask Party opposite campaigned that, you know, we should be getting these dollars from Ottawa, that as soon as they were elected, they made the decision to drop the court challenge. They were no longer going to proceed with this court challenge to get fairness for the people of Saskatchewan, fairness that had been calculated in the area, in the amount of about \$800 million a year, and perhaps more than that. They said, we're not going to do that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the message at that time when the provincial government said, we're not going to proceed with this court challenge because we can do better, we can do better, the message from the Premier — our Premier now — was that, you know, we don't need this court challenge with the federal government to get \$800 million a year. We can do better.

The Minister of Justice, the person who made the announcement — not the Premier himself — but made the announcement, we're not going to proceed with this court challenge, he said, well we can do better. We can do better than that. And, Mr. Speaker, so I guess the short of it is, if the Government of Saskatchewan can do better, can do better than \$800 million a year, then we ought to know that, and we ought to know that in great detail. And, Mr. Speaker, that is what this Bill is all about.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Being near the time of adjournment and pursuant to Rule 15(5), I ask the member to place the question, to move the motion. I recognize the member from Regina Douglas Park.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Being past the time of adjournment, this Assembly will stand adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:01.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Draude	2243
McCall	2243
Belanger	2255

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Higgins	2243
Forbes	2243
Morin	2243
Taylor	2243
Brotten	2244
Clerk Assistant (Committees)	2244

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ronald McDonald House Home Lottery	
Ross	2244
Regina Citizen Receives Award for Lifetime Commitment	
McCall	2244
Students Against Drinking and Driving	
Michelson	2245
Dr. Louis Poulin Recognized on Retirement	
Furber	2245
Funding for Rural Saskatchewan	
Kirsch	2245
Tamara's House	
Atkinson	2245
Liver Health Month	
Bradshaw	2246

QUESTION PERIOD

Graduate Retention Program	
Brotten	2246
Norris	2246
SaskWater Services	
Trew	2247
Cheveldayoff	2247
EZ Finder Phonebooks	
Calvert	2249
Cheveldayoff	2249
Crown and Government Outsourcing	
Calvert	2250
Cheveldayoff	2250
Government's Performance	
Calvert	2250
Wall	2250

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Affordable Housing Investment	
Harpauer	2251
Forbes	2252

MOTIONS

Division of Bill No. 72	
Gantefoer	2252

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Affordability of Life in Saskatchewan	
Duncan	2253, 2264
Quennell	2255
McMillan	2257, 2263
Trew	2258, 2263
LeClerc	2260, 2263
Morin	2261, 2263
Brotten	2263
Kirsch	2263
Yates	2264

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

SECOND READINGS

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

Van Mulligen.....2265

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