



FOURTH 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 — Dwain Lingenfelter

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Atkinson, Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
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Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
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Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — To you and through you, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased and honoured to welcome a group of students and staff from Father Megret High School in Wollaston Lake. Accompanying them is the principal, Harold Flett. It's good to see you. Give a wave, Harold. And also a chaperone, Veronique — give us a wave — and nine wonderful young students. It's an honour. I got a chance to meet with them last night. We'll get a chance today to have a visit.

They came a long way. They travelled by vehicle of course from Wollaston, and unfortunately, we had a little discussion about the ice road and what they have to go through and some of the conditions that they're faced to travel on when they want to come out of their community. And these students will be graduating, all of them, this year, and I was glad to hear that. They've worked hard. It's wonderful to see them in their Legislative Assembly. It is an honour that you take the time to visit us here. This is your House. We represent you as the future of our province. We owe a lot to you. We want you to continue to do the good work you're doing.

And I just want to say, your stories you shared with me yesterday, it was wonderful to hear your challenges but also the hope you have for your future. That instills something. I see your laughter. And we had a good time. And a sense of humour is good. And, Mr. Speaker, they had a wonderful sense of humour, and they want to move forward. And I just want to say it was an opportunity . . . One of them had a birthday. Kimberly, happy birthday yesterday, 21st birthday. We had a good time last night. I just wanted to acknowledge that, her birthday.

I just want to ask all members to join me in welcoming these students. And I ask all members to join me in welcoming these students and their chaperones to their Legislative Assembly. It's an honour to have you here.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to join my colleague from Cumberland in welcoming these students from Wollaston Lake. And certainly as Aboriginal members of this Assembly, as always it's always important to recognize the Aboriginal people and to tell them that this is your House just as much as it's anybody else's House. So I want to join my colleague. And I understand my colleague from Cumberland is spoiling his constituents. He's buying them something to eat today and that's a very expensive proposition, but he's a very generous man. So eat as much as you can.

And I also want to especially recognize Harold Flett, the principal. Harold taught in my home community of

Ile-a-la-Crosse. He's from Cumberland House originally and Harold's had an extensive career in public service, particularly in education. I know his family quite well — Ted and Gerry, and all the sisters and other brothers. So I want to make a special recognition of Mr. Harold Flett and to tell him in Cree:

[The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.]

So once again, Harold, welcome to your Assembly. Students, welcome to your Assembly. You've got a great MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. Thank you very much.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition in support of eliminating poverty in Saskatchewan. And we know that freedom from poverty is an enshrined human right by the United Nations, and that all citizens are entitled to social and economic security. And we know that in Saskatchewan, the economic gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, and now one in five children in Saskatchewan live in deepening poverty. And we know that citizens living in poverty have long identified affordable solutions, including the work around the Saskatoon health disparities report and the Canada Without Poverty, Dignity for All campaign. They all call for a comprehensive poverty elimination strategy. So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to act as quickly as possible to develop an effective and sustainable poverty elimination strategy for the benefit of all Saskatchewan citizens.

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

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

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Saskatoon Massey Place who live in the community of Hampton Village, and the petition is about the need for a new school in the community. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of the province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following: that Hampton Village is a rapidly growing community in Saskatoon with many young families; that Hampton Village residents pay a significant amount of taxes, including education property taxes; that children in Hampton Village deserve to be able to attend school in their own community instead of travelling to neighbouring communities to attend schools that are typically already reaching capacity.

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan cause the provincial government to devote the necessary resources for the construction of an elementary school in Hampton Village so that children in this rapidly growing neighbourhood in Saskatoon can attend school in their own community.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals who signed this petition live in the community of Hampton Village. I so present.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Saskatchewan which speaks to the issue facing these Saskatchewan residents, which is the combination of rising rents and low vacancy rates in many communities across the province and that many of these renters have suffered some pretty serious increases in their rent, and that the majority of Canadians now live in provinces with rent control guidelines including Manitoba, BC [British Columbia], Ontario, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island and that the argument that the private market would deliver sufficient affordable housing in the absence of rent control has proven to be false.

And, Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to consider enacting some form of rent control with a view to protecting Saskatchewan renters from unreasonable increases in rent.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present on behalf of citizens in Regina, Saskatoon, and Humboldt. Thank you.

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to read a petition signed by residents of Saskatchewan concerned about Bill 160 and the detrimental effect it will have on the development of human rights law in the province. And the prayer reads as follows:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan withdraw Bill 160 from consideration by the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan and hold extensive public consultations informed by a public policy paper before any amendments to the Human Rights Code, the law that supersedes all others in the province, are even considered.

Today the petition is signed by residents of Wapella, Regina, and La Ronge, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, I rise once again to present petitions on behalf of concerned residents from across Saskatchewan as it relates to the mismanagement of our finances by the Sask Party. They allude specifically to the two consecutive deficit budgets, the two years of debt growth under the Sask Party, and the consequences this has for Saskatchewan people — all at a time of unprecedented revenues to government coffers — this year alone growing the government debt, the public debt, the debt of the taxpayers by \$400 million. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly condemn the Sask Party government for its damaging financial mismanagement since taking office, a reckless fiscal record that is denying Saskatchewan people, organizations, municipalities, institutions, taxpayers, and businesses the responsible and trustworthy fiscal management that they so deserve.

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

These petitions today are signed by concerned residents of Regina. I so submit. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Martensville.

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition for a private Bill on behalf of petitioners from the board of members of Bethany College. The prayer of the petition requests an amendment to *The Bethany College Incorporation Act, 1993* to clarify that Bethany College shall not be subject to taxes or levies, specifically the education portion of property taxes, excepting those imposed by the village of Hepburn.

Thank you.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Regina Restaurant Celebrates 10th Birthday

Mr. McCall: — Happy St. Patrick's Day. Mr. Speaker, on this day as thoughts turn to celebration of the Irish and things Irish, often these thoughts will include looking for a bite to eat, a drop or two to drink, and a good craic in general. And in the city of Regina, as folks set out to celebrate, literally thousands of revellers will be converging on one of Regina's finest establishments — O'Hanlon's.

And giving folks all the more reason to celebrate, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that O'Hanlon's is marking its 10th birthday. For 10 years Niall O'Hanlon and Paul Gardikiotis and all the gang at O'Hanlon's have been serving up the black and delicious and many other tasty Irish delights at what has been consistently voted in numerous categories a winner in the *Prairie Dog* newsmagazine best of Regina survey.

And what's not to like about O'Hanlon's, Mr. Speaker? There's the friendly, thoughtful, even therapeutic service. There's the tremendous contribution to Regina's live music scene. There's the solid, mutually beneficial partnership with Robert and Anne

and the folks at the Copper Kettle. There's the pub itself, located right in the heart of beautiful downtown Regina.

And all kinds of different folks have been drawn to O'Hanlon's, whether it was the cast of *Cornet Gas* or Keifer Sutherland or downtown office workers or diplomats or business people. There's students, there's street people, or even a few journalists and politicians, Mr. Speaker.

And O'Hanlon's has taken that support and given back generously to a number of worthy causes, such as the Rachel Davis Foundation or different Dog River Howler rugby initiatives or local sports teams, just to name a few.

So happy birthday to O'Hanlon's, Mr. Speaker, and Happy St. Patrick's Day to us all. Slainte M'hath! Erin go bragh!

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

Remembering Ernest Boychuk

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to honour Saskatchewan's first ombudsman, Ernest Boychuk, who passed away earlier this week. Mr. Boychuk was born in Saskatoon on March 29th, 1934. He attended Westmount School, Bedford Road Collegiate, and took his Bachelor of Arts and Law degrees at the University of Saskatchewan.

He had an early love for the sea and joined the sea cadets where, in 1951, he was chosen to attend an Empire training camp in England. There he received the Best Class Leader of the Empire Award and enjoyed tea with the Queen at Buckingham Palace. At 29 years of age he became commander of the HMCS [Her Majesty's Canadian Ship] *Unicorn*, the youngest commanding officer in Canada at the time. His leadership was rewarded with the Silver Destroyer Award for the best reserve division in Canada.

Ernest Boychuk began his remarkable and varied career as a lawyer in Saskatoon with the law firm of Rees, Smigelski and Shmeiser, and later with the city of Saskatoon legal department. He became a magistrate, and later the first judge of the Provincial Court of Saskatchewan.

He was, to most Saskatchewan residents, most well known as Saskatchewan's first ombudsman. He was responsible for developing the framework that is now our current ombudsman system. He later chaired the Wage and Price Commission and Public Utilities Review Commission. Ernest Boychuk was very popular with the public and was a true gentleman. He was enormously proud of his Ukrainian heritage.

Mr. Speaker, Ernest Boychuk was a person who continually gave of himself to our province and truly made Saskatchewan a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Outdoor Hockey League Concludes Successful Season

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year marks the fourth year of the Outdoor Hockey League in Rosemont. Once again I enjoyed supporting the team as a coach. Mr. Speaker, nothing beats Canada's game being played on an outdoor sheet of ice. The weather was often cold, but the shack and kinship always warm.

I want to sincerely thank the dedicated group of fellow volunteer coaches, specifically Jared Kleisinger, head coach and organizer, as well as Josiah Jordan, Stephen Kenny, Clinton Kleisinger, Luke Blondeau, Brad Trew, Chad Wilchynski, Trevor Lakness, Jeff McEwen, Tyler Willox, and Curtis Dorosh.

I want to thank shack managers and community leaders Judy and Dennis Zawyrucka, and the Rosemont Mount Royal Community Association for their support. The OHL [outdoor hockey league] strives to ensure that hockey is available and accessible to all youth that want to play at no cost. I want to thank league director Laura Logan, Ehrlo Sport Venture and its donors, Conexus, KidSport and Kinsmen.

I also want to recognize the devoted players, ranging in age from 8 to 18 and the parents, guardians, and friends that joined us throughout the season, often braving the elements.

It was a fantastic season, concluding this past weekend with an indoor tournament in Lumsden. I ask all members of this Assembly to join with me to recognize and to thank all that make the Outdoor Hockey League such a meaningful program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Correctional Centre Replacement Project Receives Award

Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Regina Provincial Correctional Centre 1913 replacement project was recognized by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers or ASHRAE in the 2011 ASHRAE technology award program with an honourable mention award.

The ASHRAE technology program recognizes on an international scale successful applications of innovative design for effective energy management, indoor air quality, and good mechanical design. Specifically the RPCC [Regina Provincial Correctional Centre] of 1913 replacement project was recognized for its outstanding achievement in design and operation of energy-efficient buildings. I would like to recognize and thank MacPherson Engineering Inc. of Regina for submitting the project for the award, but more importantly for their innovative mechanical design work that led to this honourable mention.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to reducing our environmental footprint in whatever way we can, and this is just another example of that, just as our government extended the

EnerGuide program, October 31st, 2013, which provides incentives to make homes more energy-efficient.

Mr. Speaker, many, many environmentally conscious acts over a period of time will result in drastic changes in the future, and our improvements to the Regina Provincial Correctional Centre will pay dividends for future generations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Regina & District Labour Council Awards

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, last Friday, March 12th, was the Regina & District Labour Council annual awards dinner. This annual event honours the work and achievement of individuals in support of our community. This year's Labour Community Service Award went to Terri Sleeva, a community activist who has made significant contributions to our community through her volunteer service.

Her accomplishments are too long to list, Mr. Speaker. This year she was nominated for the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] Women of Distinction Award. She is a member of Oxfam Regina, Regina anti-poverty network, the Queen City tenants' association, as well as countless other boards and advocacy groups.

As many of Terri's peers mentioned at the awards ceremony, her efforts and energy are contagious and inspiring. Her dedication to the community and the social justice movement are incredible. Terri is both an important part of her community as well as an example of a leader who should be followed in her support of our community.

The second award of the evening, the Labour Activist Award, was awarded to Donna Smith and Larry Kowalchuk, two extremely dedicated community activists in their own right.

Mr. Speaker, the Regina & District Labour Council has a long-established history of community support for the working people in the Regina and area. I'd like to invite all members of the House to join me in offering congratulations and support for the efforts of the Regina & District Labour Council in recognizing community leaders in our community.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Biggar.

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thursday, March 17th is St. Patrick's Day, the annual celebration of Ireland's patron saint. St. Patrick was a Christian missionary in the fifth century. He is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. It is said he introduced the Irish to the concept of the Holy Trinity by using a three-leaf clover. Another legend tells of how St. Patrick banished all snakes from the Emerald Island. It is interesting to note though that following the ice age, there actually were no snakes in Ireland.

When this great province was founded, one in ten of our residents were of Irish origin. While many in Saskatchewan can

claim Irish ancestry, St. Patrick's Day allows everyone to be Irish for a day. The Irish have been a crucial part of Saskatchewan's development and it is fitting to recognize them. Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that everyone will raise a glass of their favourite green beverage at some point today and join in this traditional Irish toast:

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
The sun shine warm on your face,
The rain fall soft upon your fields.
And, until we meet again,
May God hold you in the hollow of his hand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Top of the morning, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is the day when the most unlikely people can be heard to say, kiss me, I'm Irish. No matter their background, everyone wants to share the good fortune and good humour of the sons and daughters of Erin's Isle. And the Irish don't mind, Mr. Speaker. They don't mind sharing their heritage with others. That's because the Irish are known for their generous and, you might even say, liberal nature.

It's been their history to share what they've been given with the whole world: their literature, their music, their learning, and their laughter — even their potatoes, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House, we don't like to talk too much about spuds, though on the other side, they love to harp on them. But it's talking, Mr. Speaker, for which the Irish are best known. They're a nation of smooth talkers with the gift of the gab. Whenever you hear the colourful turn of the phrase, Mr. Speaker, you know somewhere in the speaker's family tree, no matter how far back, there's a leaf of Irish green.

Just wait until next Tuesday, Mr. Speaker, when the Finance minister reveals his Irish heritage with all the blarney he delivers with his budget speech. Mr. Speaker, the motto of the province: "from many peoples, strength." On this feast day of St. Patrick, I ask all members to join with me in celebrating all of the many peoples' traditions — including the Irish — that give such strength to our province.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, after the election of the Sask Party, one of the big disappointments that the people of Saskatchewan had was the shutdown of the kidney transplant program. In 2009 I think was the year it was shut down. This is a program that had done a number of surgeries where families' issues around kidney transplants were looked after. That program has been restarted I believe last year, September 1st.

My question to the minister is, after six months of reopening the program, how many surgeries have been done? How many

kidney transplants have taken place in the first six months of the reopening of that program?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that Saskatchewan residents are receiving transplants as matches are made. They're being done in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, paid for by the Saskatchewan government. Living donor transplants are being done here now, Mr. Speaker. As far as the exact number, I don't have that available today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, we had put a question to the government asking the question of the number of surgeries completed since the opening. And the question was to the Minister of Health: how many kidney transplants have been completed in Saskatchewan from September 1, 2010 to March 6th? That's in the first six months. The answer is three; that's how many have been done in the first six months of the reopening of the program.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, in the last full year that the program operated, 37 surgery transplants of kidneys were done in the province of Saskatchewan under a program that was in place for many, many decades, worked successfully, did hundreds of transplants.

To the minister: can he tell the people of the province how he's pleased with a record that shows that in the first six months since the reopening of the program only three transplants have been completed?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the important thing to keep in mind here is Saskatchewan residents are receiving transplants, Mr. Speaker. In many cases it's in Alberta, paid for by the provincial government here.

Mr. Speaker, part of the issue is we're currently working on recruiting more specialists. Mr. Speaker, recruitment's an issue not only in Saskatchewan, all across Canada, Mr. Speaker. We've done good work in recruitment of physicians in general. We've added 228 more physicians, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly not afraid to set targets like the members opposite were. A good example of that, Mr. Speaker, was in nurse recruitment. They wouldn't set targets, Mr. Speaker. We set a target of 800 nurses during our first term of government and, Mr. Speaker, we've already exceeded that.

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

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, when it comes to dealing with important issues to Saskatchewan families this government is less than outstanding. And when it comes to the kidney transplant program, nothing stands out more than the fact that they shut down a program that was doing 37 transplants per year — and had for many decades in this

province — was shut down. Now reopened, likely the press conference cost more than what they're putting into the program.

The fact is, at a time when 115 families are on the wait-list in the province, when we have record resource revenue, how is that the minister and this government can't get their facts lined up and the program back in place that will meet the needs of Saskatchewan families who are under stress waiting for kidney transplants in this province?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Highways and Transportation minister.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, the patients are the important thing here. And, Mr. Speaker, it's important to know that all patients with matching kidneys have already received their surgeries. Any on the waiting list are waiting for a match, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we're ensuring that people who do have the opportunity to have the transplant get it done, many of them in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important issue. Mr. Speaker, those comments are coming from the Leader of the Opposition of the party that closed 52 hospitals in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

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

Environmental Issues

Mr. Taylor: — Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The New Democratic Party has been asking important questions about what this government is doing to protect the people of Saskatchewan from the very real concern of pollution coming from the oil sands area of Alberta.

In response yesterday, the minister said he wanted to take a collaborative approach. Mr. Speaker, there's nothing wrong with collaboration, but we've seen how this government's collaborative approach works with other governments. With Ottawa there was nothing for the Montana carbon capture project, nothing for the 800 million of resource revenues that we're owed from Ottawa. And, Mr. Speaker, with Alberta, no progression whatsoever on the road to Fort McMurray from La Loche. Why should the people of Saskatchewan expect anything to come out of a collaborative approach other than another empty promise?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the acting Environment critic from the opposition for his question. And we had a very good discussion about this yesterday, Mr. Speaker. This is a topic that we take very, very seriously, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're going to be moving forward as we've identified with an acid deposition management framework in the coming weeks, as well as an enhanced boreal water testing program coming forward this fall . . . this spring, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the acting critic for the Environment yesterday

had a number of areas where he was inaccurate, as was the Environment critic on Tuesday, Mr. Speaker. In fact the Environment critic a couple of days ago said that funding had been reduced. In fact that is not the case, Mr. Speaker, under this government.

In fact if you want to look at the record of the NDP [New Democratic Party], Mr. Speaker, the last . . . They raised the issue of Lake Athabasca, Mr. Speaker. Lake Athabasca, the last testing that we had prior to this government was in 1999, Mr. Speaker. From '99 until 2007, there wasn't a comprehensive testing of Lake Athabasca. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when that ended I think the member from Athabasca was the Environment minister.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Mr. Speaker, of course the members opposite heard me say there's nothing wrong with collaboration, but the people of Saskatchewan need more than a collaborative approach. In fact we need a comprehensive approach, Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive plan.

The pollution from another province is affecting Saskatchewan, and besides the health and environmental impacts, it also affects us financially. Can the minister tell us what he's doing to quantify the damage oil sands pollution is doing to the environment and the people of Saskatchewan? And how will he determine what this province will seek in financial compensation for that damage?

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

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, further to my previous answer on Lake Athabasca because that was an area that was raised by the opposition, Mr. Speaker, we have tested downstream areas of the lake in 2007, 2008, 2009. We will be doing so further this year, Mr. Speaker, and we are in the final stages of implementing a water monitoring program for the lake itself with the governments of Canada and Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be able to tell the people of Saskatchewan how our northern lakes have changed over the past 20 years. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell the people of Saskatchewan what those lakes were like 20 years ago because the NDP didn't monitor the lakes in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We are making up a lot of ground in filling the gaps that were left by the previous government. In fact, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to quote by a report issued by the Saskatchewan Environmental Society in 2009, and it says:

Prior to the autumn of 2007, there had been very little monitoring for acid rain in northern Saskatchewan. However, this has now changed for the better. We wish to commend Saskatchewan Environment staff for the very important monitoring work they have undertaken over the past two years.

Mr. Peter Prebble was one of the authors of this.

[10:30]

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Minister of the Environment already quantified the history of the lakes of northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. He once called them pristine, Mr. Speaker. So we can go from pristine to where they're going in the future, Mr. Speaker, and what are we going to do about that?

Pollution, Mr. Speaker, is migrating across the Alberta-Saskatchewan border by air and by water. Studies have shown that water around the oil sands is becoming contaminated and flowing into Saskatchewan. The air we breathe is poisoned as 70 per cent of the gases expelled from the oil sands are blown into Saskatchewan. But the Saskatchewan Party is only telling us they want to take the collaborative approach to this problem. They're not saying if he's actually doing anything to protect us from these toxins.

If there's one thing we know, Mr. Speaker, we're being poisoned. And it's another thing to know, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing about it. So why won't the minister give us detailed facts about what's being done to reduce the amount of poison being pumped into Saskatchewan from Alberta? Or is he embarrassed because he's actually done nothing but use the word collaborative?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, I think the only people that need to be embarrassed on the record on this issue is the NDP, who had 16 years to enhance the monitoring of northern Saskatchewan and didn't do so. Mr. Speaker, the acting critic of the Environment, like the Environment critic for the NDP, has talked about a 70 per cent emissions that come from Alberta into Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, that is from a report that studied sulphur emissions from Alberta and that report, Mr. Speaker, was issued in 1996 when they were the government, Mr. Speaker.

What did they do? Did they enhance monitoring in northern Saskatchewan? No, Mr. Speaker. In fact they cancelled the monitoring of Lake Athabasca. Mr. Speaker, we're going to be coming forward with an acid deposition management framework, enhanced testing of our boreal forest lakes, Mr. Speaker, and making up for the lack of action by the former NDP government.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to work with Alberta on this, Mr. Speaker. A promise to work together with another province however, without knowing how we will quantify the damage or determine what the compensation will be, is not good enough, Mr. Speaker. Toxic pollutants are a very real concern to Saskatchewan families, particularly parents who want to keep their children healthy.

Instead this government isn't doing anything definitive with the province of Alberta and the federal government to actually reduce the poisons coming out of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Alberta is receiving revenue from the oil sands,

but Saskatchewan is paying the price. Why can't the minister understand that building a comprehensive plan today will protect Saskatchewan families for generations to come?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this House over the past days, we have increased the amount of monitoring that is taking place in northern Saskatchewan to make up for the lack of information that the province has at its disposal during the NDP 16 years of government, Mr. Speaker.

And in fact we've enhanced the capabilities within our ministry resources to be able to use that information to establish what is actually happening in northern Saskatchewan and to model what could potentially happen to our lakes and our environment in northern Saskatchewan in the future, capacity that didn't exist under the NDP government, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're working at the federal level with our provincial and federal counterparts on a comprehensive air management system, Mr. Speaker, including acid rain, which is very important, Mr. Speaker, on this file.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the acting critic for the Environment mentioned that, well the NDP government they thought the environment was a priority, but they had less money to deal with it, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see that the member has identified that if seven and a half billion dollars is the revenue of the government, that maybe under that it wasn't much of a priority, but if they had more money they would have done more, Mr. Speaker. We believe that the environment is a priority, no matter the resources of the government.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Condition of Northern Roads

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, the natural resources in the North generates millions of dollars for the province. The trucks that drive Highway 102 serve the mining industry and help generate that money. Highway 102 is the only road access for communities like Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Stanley Mission, Missinipe, and Southend. Thousands of people depend on this road to get to and from their home and their place of work.

To the minister: will he commit today to investing that wealth into paving Highway 102 to Southend?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Highways and Transportation.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the important role that the North plays in the economy of this province, not just now, but in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when our government took office we inherited a massive infrastructure deficit. I think the most noticeable part of that infrastructure deficit was this condition of highways. We were considered the province with the worst highways in the country when we took office, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, probably the most noticeable area is the North, as the member opposite said. Mr. Speaker, we have spent a huge amount of money in the North on not only maintenance, we have a northern transportation advisory committee that's helping us prioritize highways, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to do good highway work in the North.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP committed to building an all-weather road for Wollaston Lake. Since the Sask Party took over, the construction of this road has slowed to a snail's pace.

Last April a teacher died on the ice road when she crashed into a large crack on the winter road that goes across the lake. Leadership in the community in Wollaston Lake is concerned about the lack of attention the government is paying to the road and to the safety for their staff, students, and community members.

To the minister: when is he going to take some of the resource money generated in northern Saskatchewan and invest it into an all-weather road in Wollaston Lake?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a fatality on a highway is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker. It's a tragedy for the friends and family of the deceased, and it's a tragedy for all of us for a life that's lost too soon.

Mr. Speaker, safety's a number one priority for this government. As I mentioned, the northern transportation advisory committee has helped us prioritize highways in the North. They've identified Highway 155 as number one on the list, Mr. Speaker. We will be moving forward there.

The member is specifically talking about the Wollaston Lake road. Mr. Speaker, construction will continue on the Wollaston Lake road as well. I understand it certainly isn't moving as quickly as the member opposite would like to see. But, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out he mentioned the commitment that the NDP made before the election. Mr. Speaker, the NDP made massive amounts of commitments right before the election. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, spring is coming. The roads in the North are going to be getting softer, and many are in terrible shape already. For people in many communities, the crumbling, unsafe, muddy highway is the only way in and out of their communities. And they are tired of this minister's rhetoric and they want action now.

Mr. Speaker, when is the minister going to stand up and start making some serious commitments to roads to La Loche, to Patuanak, and into Canoe Lake?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, there is a massive infrastructure deficit right across this province, Mr. Speaker, not just in highways, Mr. Speaker. In education, in schools that need to be built and repaired. In health care, Mr. Speaker, it's hospitals and long-term care facilities.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is a massive infrastructure deficit from years of neglect from the members opposite in highways in this province. Mr. Speaker, in the year that's wrapping up right now, the fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, \$41 million on highways in the North. Mr. Speaker, that's a 7 per cent increase over the previous budget. And as far as specifics, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will be able to learn more next week at the budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the people in the North are saying that the minister is not doing anything. And the minister often talks about, 16 years you were in power; why didn't you do something? Mr. Speaker, for 16 of those years, 13 were spent cleaning up that Tory mess, Mr. Speaker. That's where the 16 years went, Mr. Speaker. When our Education budget was one-third the annual debt that we paid on interest alone, Mr. Speaker, that's where the money went, Mr. Speaker. When interest alone on the annual basis almost doubled that of our entire Health budget, that's where the money went, Mr. Speaker.

One small business owner was told by the ministry that the roads she travels are not properly funded for maintenance, even though people can't travel on the road after it rains. Mr. Speaker, this business owner said to me, "If they ever spent a day out of Regina, they would see what the roads are really like. Whoever thinks that roads are properly funded sure doesn't live up here."

Well, Mr. Speaker, she didn't want her name used for a number of reasons. But once again, Mr. Speaker, when is this out-of-touch minister start getting to his feet and start defending northern people and fixing their roads?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, this minister's on his feet right now defending northern Saskatchewan from those members opposite. Mr. Speaker, that member was a former minister of Highways, and what did he do in the North? He did nothing, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government, 41 million . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. I recognize the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Mr. Speaker, this government in the current fiscal year, \$41 million in the North, 7 per cent increase. Mr. Speaker, last fall that member challenged me to a public debate. Let's continue the public debate for the rest of this session, Mr. Speaker.

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

Relationship Between Colleges

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, for months the Minister of Advanced Education has been supporting and encouraging the merger of the public Carlton Trail Regional College and the private St. Peter's College. Today, minutes before question period, the minister issued a news release stating that the merger will not go ahead. Mr. Speaker, why did it take so long for this minister and the local MLAs to listen to the many concerns from the community from over a year ago?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, thanks very much for an opportunity to speak directly to this issue. Mr. Speaker, what we've said as we've come into office is we're going to be responsive to demands and ideas from local communities, especially regarding post-secondary education, and at the same time we're going to be responsible to the taxpayers and most especially the students, Mr. Speaker, right across the province.

What we said is the respective colleges, in this case St. Peter's and Carlton Trail, should come up with their own plan. They submitted a proposal, Mr. Speaker. What we did was then did our own due diligence, Mr. Speaker. That report was submitted to us by Meyers Norris and Penny. After an independent review, Mr. Speaker, Meyers Norris and Penny recommended, and we accept the recommendations, that the colleges are not ready for a merger, Mr. Speaker. This demonstrates our due diligence, Mr. Speaker, being responsive to communities and responsible to students and stakeholders right across the province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's talk about due diligence is garbage. This process, Mr. Speaker, has lacked transparency from the get-go. Mr. Speaker, the winter-spring 2010 newsletter from St. Peter's College says, "In the other development, the St. Peter's College and Carlton Trail College are merging into one institution." It goes on to say, "The provincial government is encouraging the merger." From the Carlton Trail Regional College minutes from a board meeting on January of 2010, "Direction has been given from Minister Norris to proceed."

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this process has lacked transparency as shown in committee and through question period. We know that millions have been poured into this, the minister's merger, through the knowledge infrastructure program. And who knows how much, what is the cost of the Meyers Norris Penny report?

To the minister: be clear with the people of Saskatchewan. Be transparent for once on this issue: what is the total cost of this failed merger?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has demonstrated a very unique capacity to misunderstand the post-secondary file, Mr. Speaker. He made reference to the knowledge infrastructure program. Mr. Speaker, what we said is, let's participate with the federal government, Mr. Speaker, in one of the most aggressive infrastructure developments in post-secondary education in the history of this province.

We went forward, Mr. Speaker, with countless projects. We went forward, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we were supporting institutions right across the province. We were able to support both institutions, Mr. Speaker, that in Humboldt, Mr. Speaker, that's part of an initiative with the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system and the post-secondary system. That construction is under way, Mr. Speaker. As well we were able to move forward in a partnership with the federal government regarding St. Peter's, Mr. Speaker.

Those were just a couple of examples from the initiatives from right across the province. The initiative of the knowledge infrastructure program, Mr. Speaker, more than \$117 million dedicated to ensuring that our students are able to succeed, not only in their studies, but in their careers right here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

[10:45]

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the minister talks about the two institutions because the two institutions for some time now, Mr. Speaker, have been sharing the CEO [chief executive officer] as approved by the Minister of Advanced Education.

The government news release issued this morning goes on to say, "The minister requested the boards of both schools immediately place the current CEO on administrative leave pending the outcome of the current review." Mr. Speaker, we know that the joint CEO was approved by this minister.

Mr. Speaker, why has the minister demanded that the CEO be placed on leave? What is the basis of his instruction to the two boards? And, Mr. Speaker, who is conducting the review of the CEO? Thank you.

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

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there were a range of questions that came up, Mr. Speaker. What I said very clearly to the respective institutions — this was last night in Humboldt, Mr. Speaker — what we said regarding this issue is we would request that the respective institutions place this individual on leave for 90 days while some of these questions can be addressed. They're going to be addressed by Meyers Norris and Penny, Mr. Speaker.

We thought this was a very, very prudent approach to move forward and address some of these questions, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Corrections, Public Safety and Policing.

Flood Preparedness

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure everyone is aware that flooding in the spring and summer of 2010 devastated several Saskatchewan communities. From what we're hearing from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, the potential for flooding this coming spring and summer is quickly becoming very real.

Both municipalities and individuals in crisis have come to depend on the provincial disaster assistance program for help. Despite an overwhelming amount of changes to the program, this government recognizes that more is needed to be done to ensure flood victims are receiving help in a timely way.

In the summer of 2010, our government made several changes to the provincial disaster assistance program that were a long time coming. We provided appropriate financial support to those affected by the floods including immediate financial assistance to many claimants. We also worked to improve the feasibility, the flexibility of a program by addressing some long-standing concerns. These changes were very well received. But as a government, we know that there's even more work that can be done.

As of four days ago, on March the 14th, 2011, PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] had received a combined total of 5,900 individual and municipal claims, with over 3,900 payments made totalling over \$14.5 million. This is the largest number of claims received in one year in the history of PDAP. 2005-2006 was the second highest with less than half the claims of 2010.

Given our extremely high claims volume, our government recognized more staff is required to ensure our goal of assisting people in a meaningful way as quickly as possible and that continues to be met. The previous government took over a year to get any financial assistance whatsoever into flood victims' hands. Our government however knows that is not good enough.

So in order to ensure claimants receive payments in a reasonable amount of time, and in order to prepare for the possibility of future flooding, I'm pleased to say our government is once again taking action. Our goal is to take the average processing time down to three months or less from the date PDAP has received all of the information necessary to process payment.

To do so, we will be doing the following: we will immediately recruit and retain 30 additional temporary staff to complement our current temporary staff of 22. These staff will either be reassigned from within government or be new temporary employees. They will work two shifts per day, six days a week, to better utilize time and our current space and equipment. This will take place immediately. The cost for these staff will be in the vicinity of \$800,000 when salaries and overhead are factored in. However with the ability to recover 65 to 85 per

cent of our costs from the disaster financial assistance arrangements or DFAA, the total cost to taxpayers should be less than \$300,000.

In addition PDAP officials are busy streamlining processes to reduce the processing time. Part of that includes looking at processing claims based on their relative size and risk.

In closing, I'm confident these changes will further improve PDAP, and more importantly go a long way in assisting the great people of this province. Thank you.

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my response to the minister's remarks, the minister's statement, I want to thank the minister for providing me with a copy of his statement earlier this morning.

As the minister alluded to in his remarks, last year was an exceptional year. And we hope that when we look back years from now, it will be an exceptional year, although there is considerable concern, again alluded to in the minister's remarks, that this year again may be a very desperate and disturbing year for many Saskatchewan residents, depending on how the melt proceeds, Mr. Speaker.

As some members of this Assembly know, my son is a reservist and recently received flood training. And I understand, I don't think it's a national secret, that the Armed Forces are expected to be deployed, including reservists, in Manitoba fairly soon, and we hope not necessarily in Saskatchewan, but perhaps that will may indeed be the case.

The minister seems fairly well pleased in his statement with the response of the provincial government. I think there'd be many members of the Legislative Assembly who, on both sides of the House, who have heard complaints about the administration of the PDAP program, Mr. Speaker. And certainly we heard from the Association of Rural Municipalities' concern about delay in paying out thousands and thousands of dollars in flood claims, Mr. Speaker, and we are going into a new year.

The ministerial statement centres upon additional staff to process these claims and to deal with these issues, Mr. Speaker, and that is to be welcomed. And we hope that the government can do a better job, an improved job over last year's performance. None of the fact that this is an emergency or an urgent circumstance justifies anything, of course, less than responsible, accountable, and transparent awarding of contracts for reparations and restoration. And we will be holding the government to those requirements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To ask leave to move substitution on committees.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Dewdney has asked for leave to move substitution of members on

committees. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

MOTIONS

Substitution on Committees

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move:

That the name Frank Quennell be substituted for the name of Kim Trew on the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Dewdney has moved:

That the name of Frank Quennell be substituted for the name of Kim Trew on the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move:

That the name of Sandra Morin be substituted for the name of Ron Harper on the Standing Committee on the Economy.

The Speaker: — Order. The Opposition House Leader has moved:

That the name of Sandra Morin be substituted for the name of Ron Harper on the Standing Committee on the Economy.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to order the answers to questions 869 through 871.

The Speaker: — Questions 869 through 871 are ordered.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

Voting Eligibility Requirements

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, and at the end of my remarks, I will be moving a motion relating to calling on the NDP to support the changes to *The Election Act* and to *The Local Government Election Act*.

This change, Mr. Speaker, was originated by SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] with a request to the government that these changes be put in place for voter ID [identification] to become part of the requirements necessary to vote in municipal elections. We responded positively as a government to that request, Mr. Speaker, as we respond positively to most if not all of the requests coming from organizations such as SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and SUMA as it relates to their endeavours.

But, Mr. Speaker, we felt it was important that in Saskatchewan, under the legislation of Saskatchewan, where Saskatchewan has control of it, that the voting requirements should be similar across the board where possible, Mr. Speaker. And so that's why we have included, not only just *The Local Government Election Act*, Mr. Speaker, but also the provincial elections Act to maintain a similarity between both so that under legislation all the voters would be treated equally, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is not something new and out-of-the-blue that's Saskatchewan only. This happens, Mr. Speaker, at federal elections as well as provincial elections in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. So, Mr. Speaker, the majority of people in Saskatchewan do operate with a system of voter ID in place.

In the minister's second reading speech, Mr. Speaker, he did a very good job at outlining how this would work and what kind of ID would be useful or proper to be used, Mr. Speaker, in identifying a voter when they came to the polling station. And it's a fairly exhaustive list, Mr. Speaker, that the minister outlined, such as driver's licence, health card, Canadian citizen passport, certificate of Canadian citizenship, a birth certificate, a status Indian certificate, a social insurance number card, old age security card, student ID, provincial territorial identification card, liquor ID card, Mr. Speaker, hospital and medical clinic card, and on and on. There's about three paragraphs here, Mr. Speaker, of various types of ID that would be acceptable for proving one's identity when they come to the polling station, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, voters from across the province will be using these ID cards when they vote in federal elections. They will be using these ID cards when they vote in municipal elections, and they will be using these ID cards, Mr. Speaker, when they vote in provincial elections.

So, Mr. Speaker, it won't be long before voters are experienced with this and very familiar with the process. But we understand that when the law changes, people in general are not that

observant before the fact actually happens. So we will be proceeding with a broad educational component to these changes, Mr. Speaker, to allow people to become familiar with the requirements when they go to vote in either provincial or municipal elections, Mr. Speaker.

[11:00]

And the reason, Mr. Speaker, that these changes are taking place across the country and in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, is to protect democracy, to maintain the integrity of our democratic process. Mr. Speaker, if you listened to the members of the opposition, they would argue the exact opposite saying, it has never been a problem. It has never happened that there have been irregularities in the electoral process. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out one in particular that affects this House, that affected this House in the past, and still has some effect on this House.

In 1999, Mr. Speaker, in the election in Wood River, an individual was elected by one vote, that being cast by the returning officer in the proper manner, Mr. Speaker. When that election was challenged, many irregularities were found during that election including a large number of people, large enough to affect the outcome of that election, who voted in Wood River but were not resident in Wood River and therefore not allowed to vote in the Wood River constituency, Mr. Speaker.

The judge found this and threw out the election result because of inappropriate voting by individuals who were not entitled to vote in that constituency, Mr. Speaker. They were fully entitled to vote in whatever constituency they were resident in if they were residents of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The judge found in this case they were not residents in the Wood River constituency. The election was overturned, and in 2000 there was a by-election, a costly by-election, Mr. Speaker, which I'm happy to report that the current member for Wood River won very handily, Mr. Speaker. He won it again in 2003, and he won again in 2007, Mr. Speaker. And he will win it again in 2011, is my prediction.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are saying that if this change takes place that immigrants will be disenfranchised, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, immigrants are not allowed to vote in Saskatchewan elections. They are not Canadian citizens, even though they may be resident in Saskatchewan. Once they become Canadian citizens, Mr. Speaker, they are no longer immigrants. They are now Canadians, Mr. Speaker, and entitled to vote in the province of their residency and in the constituency of their residency, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would find it highly unlikely that any new Canadian citizen would not have a passport or some other form of photo ID, such as a driver's licence. Each and every one of those individuals would still have family remaining in whichever jurisdiction they emigrated from and would be wanting to return to visit their loved ones, so they would have at least a passport, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the facetious arguments that have been presented by the members opposite are not valid.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen that in the past there has been

subterfuge and ballot box stuffing occur within Saskatchewan. We don't know if that has happened in provincial or municipal elections, but it certainly has happened in party elections, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party as part of their nomination process requirements, rule no. 7 demands that voters who vote in a nomination process for a candidate for provincial election have photo ID to identify their constituency of residency. So, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP members condemn the legislation that we have presented in *The Election Act* and *The Local Government Election Act*, they are condemning the very practice put in place by their own party, Mr. Speaker.

Now if you look at what happened in the recent NDP leadership race, I can certainly understand why they would now have that in their requirements for nomination, Mr. Speaker. When we look at what happened in the Meadow Lake constituency where one individual, one individual sold memberships, Mr. Speaker, or claimed to have sold memberships, putting 1,100 names on those applications and submitting them to the NDP central headquarters, Mr. Speaker.

Now with the requirement of a photo ID, I'm not sure how they plan to have that 1,100 new members vote when the members didn't even know they were members of the NDP Party. So somebody, Mr. Speaker, was going to access that voters list and the cards that entitled those members to vote, and vote for this, either as an individual or as an organized attempt, Mr. Speaker. That constitutes voter fraud, Mr. Speaker, voter fraud that was caught by the other candidates in that election. And that volunteer, Mr. Speaker, was a volunteer for the current member from Regina Douglas Park, the Leader of the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand why the New Democratic Party demand voter ID and residency identification in their nomination process because it's certainly been a problem within their party in the past, Mr. Speaker, very recent past — two years ago roughly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan support this move to ensure the integrity of our voting process and the integrity, Mr. Speaker, of our voters and of our elections, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Regina Rosemont the other day was saying that we were disenfranchising seniors, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, most of our seniors have voter ID of some kind: driver's licences, passports, the many other types of identifiers that we have designated, Mr. Speaker. And he would seem to be indicating that the seniors in my constituency personally did not support me. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have won the vote of seniors in my constituency consistently for many years. And in fact if they want to check the polling results of the long-term care facilities, I have won those all as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we see this attempt by the New Democrats as another attack on rural Saskatchewan in particular. They went through the closure of hospitals across the province including, Mr. Speaker, in my own constituency, Gainsborough, Oxbow, Lampman, Fillmore, and Wawota, Mr. Speaker. They closed acute care in every one of those constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, this change will be to the benefit of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there is a number of other comments that have been made by the members opposite, which I think that bear some concern. You know, it reminds me a little bit of George Orwell's allegory in the *Animal Farm* where all of the animals are equal, but some animals seem to be more equal than others. And in this case, Mr. Speaker, the NDP believe that the rules that they use in their leadership, in their nomination process, is good for them but the same rules should not apply to the general voter in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we do not believe in elitism like the NDP do. We believe that everyone, Mr. Speaker, needs to be treated equally in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this process is good across the country; it is good in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker; and I am very pleased that we can support this process.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Coronation Park was saying that it's a shame, that shame on this piece of legislation, which in actual fact is almost a carbon copy of the NDP's own rules. He called this change offensive, Mr. Speaker, so I gather he is speaking also against the rules of the NDP Party when it comes to the nomination process. I guess, I guess he just maybe isn't familiar with the rules of his own political party because clearly, clearly the Leader of the Official Opposition wasn't particularly clear about the rules of his party, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that these two Acts are very good Acts and well needed in the province of Saskatchewan. I would therefore move:

That this Assembly call on the opposition NDP to support *The Election Amendment Act, 2010* and *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2010*, as they are precisely in line with the NDP's policies regarding constituency rules and regulations for their nomination process.

I so move.

The Speaker: — The motion by the member from Cannington is:

That this Assembly call on the opposition NDP to support *The Election Amendment Act, 2010* and *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2010*, as they are precisely in line with NDP policies regarding constituency rules and regulations for their nomination process.

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased this afternoon to enter into this debate. Mr. Speaker, we have a member moving a motion, citing that it's in precise line with the rules and procedures of the New Democratic Party. And, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that that is outright wrong. Mr. Speaker, it isn't anywhere near the rules of the New Democratic Party.

To use the voting procedures of another political party in its

internal processes and say it's the same when you don't even, you're not a member of that party, you haven't participated in that party, and you're quoting rules that don't exist, Mr. Speaker, well then I have concerns about the whole premise in which they brought forward the legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they can say that those are the rules, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that those aren't the rules. Mr. Speaker, the rules of the New Democratic Party in its nomination process say that the local constituency executive gets to establish the rules that govern the individual nomination. So, Mr. Speaker, they may have a set of rules that was used in one constituency for one reason or another at some point in the history of the party, but those aren't the rules of the party. That's a rule of a single constituency, if they even have such a rule in any constituency that was ever used.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is a more fundamental issue about democratic rights and about the rights of every Canadian citizen having the right to vote. Our democracy is more important than any political party's view on how they can marginalize voters or how they can get themselves re-elected in the next provincial election. But, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what this government's trying to do is they're trying to disenfranchise voters that likely don't vote for them. Mr. Speaker, that's an abuse of our democratic system and it's abuse of power of a government and it's downright wrong.

Mr. Speaker, when these same rules were put in place by the federal government, then federal chief electoral officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley was strongly opposed to requirements for voter ID because it would be a barrier to students, low-income voters, and new Canadians. Mr. Speaker, those are the exact same concerns that we have brought forward day in and day out in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

The right to vote, Mr. Speaker. I want to repeat that. The right to vote. Every Canadian citizen has a right to vote. If you don't have photo identification and you take away that right from that citizen, you're disenfranchising that citizen. You're making them a second-class citizen. You're taking away a right that's been guaranteed since the very inception of our country. And, Mr. Speaker, that should be important to all of us who are responsible for democratic processes.

[11:15]

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is no system in the world that's perfect. There is no system that we can say that there may not ever be a mistake made. But, Mr. Speaker, to put in place a set of rules that disenfranchises citizens of our country that don't have photo identification, who may not have a permanent residence because they can't afford rent or can't afford to own a home, to say those people that don't have a permanent residence and don't have photo identification aren't citizens and don't have rights, Mr. Speaker, that's going back to the day when we didn't allow women to vote in our society and we didn't allow Aboriginal Canadians to vote in our country.

Mr. Speaker, we've advanced significantly. We have in our country some of the most advanced democratic rights in the world. Why, at this point in our time, do we have a government who wants to go backwards? Why does it want to

disenfranchise any citizen from exercising their right to vote? Mr. Speaker, it is one of the most important things any Canadian can ever have, and that is the right to exercise their vote, the right to determine who will govern them, the right to determine who will make decisions on behalf of all Saskatchewan people. And, Mr. Speaker, that's a very serious right.

Mr. Speaker, during the process of interviewing candidates for the future chief electoral officer in Saskatchewan, when people were asked the question whether or not they agreed with the issue of voter identification, none of them did. Electoral officials across this country disagree with the requirement for photo identification. And they do it for a reason: because they strongly believe in the principles of our democratic society and strongly believe in the principles that every citizen has the right to vote.

Now, Mr. Speaker, anything any government does, any government does, that limits the right of a citizen to exercise what is their ultimate authority — their right to decide who gets to make the laws, who gets to make the decisions in which all citizens must live by — to take that right away from any citizen, Mr. Speaker, is wrong. It is absolutely wrong.

Mr. Speaker, it's well known that those who have lower income statuses, Mr. Speaker, those who don't understand our political system well, new Canadians, Mr. Speaker, Aboriginal Canadians who live in remote areas, senior citizens who live in nursing homes — they're less likely to have photo identification because in the case of some they don't drive. In the case of others there's no reason to drive, Mr. Speaker.

But it all goes to a fundamental right, Mr. Speaker. And that fundamental right is, every citizen should have every opportunity . . . We should do everything we can to broaden the opportunities of Canadian citizens to vote, not in any way try to limit those who participate in the voting process, Mr. Speaker. We should not do anything to eliminate or disenfranchise any citizen exercising the one and most important fundamental right, the most important fundamental right that any citizen has that comes with their citizenship and being Canadian, Mr. Speaker. And when we limit that right, Mr. Speaker, we are abusing our power as legislators. We are abusing our power as legislators when at any time we try to take away the democratic right of any citizen to vote for any reason, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, years ago those issues were challenged, and those who are incarcerated in prisons were given the right to vote, Mr. Speaker. And the courts took away, the courts took away their rights and put them in . . . They incarcerated them, Mr. Speaker, and at one point they lost their right to vote. And then the courts decided they had the right to vote, Mr. Speaker.

So we have had example after example after example in our country where we have gone beyond to ensure that citizens had the right to vote. It is the most important right any Canadian citizen has. And, Mr. Speaker, there may not be, there may not be negative intentions in this legislation. There may not be. It doesn't matter what the intention is though if the consequence is that even a single citizen who wanted to exercise their right to vote, who should have been able to exercise their right to vote, doesn't get that right to vote.

Mr. Speaker, if a single citizen who shows up at the polls — who lives in that voting area, Mr. Speaker, in that constituency, or in that civic electoral district, Mr. Speaker — does not get the right to vote, then we have by our actions discriminated against that citizen and taken away that which is most fundamental for every Canadian, that which makes us stand out around the world in our values as a society that sets us out from many, many, many countries around the world.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to attribute motive. We can do many things, we can do many things to encourage people to vote. We can do many things to allow people to exercise their right to vote but, Mr. Speaker, we had an example used by the Government House Leader about a problem where there was a problem in Wood River. But, Mr. Speaker, the system obviously worked because the system caught the problem and the system corrected the problem, Mr. Speaker. The system corrected the problem. A system that corrects its own problem, Mr. Speaker, is a system that's working.

So let's not create, let's not create a scenario that disenfranchises a single Canadian voter.

The Speaker: — The member's time has lapsed. I recognize the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under *The Election Amendment Act, 2010* every voter is required to produce ID adequate to supply proof of identity and residency in order to vote. If enumerated, the voter may use government-issued photo ID that establishes identity and ordinary residency. If not enumerated or they do not have photo ID, voters must show two pieces of prescribed ID such as social insurance card, a utility bill, to establish both identity and ordinary residency. These are the changes that our government has proposed for the municipal and provincial election Act.

I would like to once again read into the record the Regina Northeast NDP rules for nomination dated, Mr. Speaker, 2010. I quote:

Section 5: During registration of eligible voters at the nomination convention, any person not appearing as a member on the most recent membership list provided by the provincial office shall be required to provide proof of membership and residency before being permitted to register to vote.

Section 6, and I quote, "In any case where a question of residency in the constituency arises, the chairperson of the credentials committee will request proof of residency."

Section 7, and I quote:

For the purpose of proving residency, a driver's licence or comparable government-issued photo identification is preferred. However, the following are acceptable: a letter, invoice, or property tax notice issued within the previous 90 days from a government agency or utility . . . that is addressed to or identifies persons at this address within the boundaries of the constituency.

Adults who are voting delegates can also establish proof

of residency by providing proof that they are the spouses (married or common law) of another adult who has established proof of residency.

Children under 18 years of age can establish proof of residency by providing proof that they are the minor children of adults who have established proof of residency. Persons 18 years of age and older residing with their parents will be required to provide separate proof of residency.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. I understand some members have a debate going on between them. I'd ask that they'd, if they'd simply go behind the bar to enter into the debate and allow the member from Regina Wascana Plains to be heard. Thank you. I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Our . . . [inaudible] . . . for supporting this amendment has to do with the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We know that the people of Saskatchewan, the people of Canada expect that their government is going to do whatever is necessary to ensure the integrity of a voting process. People do not want government sticking their nose into most things. However, Mr. Speaker, I do know that they do want them to stick their nose into ensuring the integrity of these processes.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join in in such a lively debate on policies that are so very similar, Mr. Speaker. The only problem is, is that it appears that the opposition members do not seem to know or understand their own party's policies. There have been many comments in this House about Bill 161, *The Election Amendment Act, 2010* and Bill 162, *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2010*. Certain opposition members have spoken with full outrage, stating requiring voters to supply proof of residency is an attempt to disenfranchise the public. And I quote:

Now the Saskatchewan Party will tell you that, well they can go and get photo ID. [Heaven forbid, Mr. Speaker.] It doesn't have to be a driver's licence. [And I quote.] They can go to any licence issuer and get photo ID. Well isn't that fantastic, Mr. Speaker? [This person continues.] So we're going to make people go through the extra trouble to exercise their right to vote in the country of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the province expect that this government, our government, will ensure that there is integrity in the voting process in this province. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering now if the member from Regina Walsh Acres would also like to repeat these words to her NDP Party organizers that required the NDP faithful to produce proof of residency of their members. Now if it is such a terrible inconvenience to have people in the province show proof of residency when voting, why would her own party require this from the NDP members in their nomination process?

The member from Regina Coronation Park also made comments on *The Election Amendment Act* as recently as Tuesday in this House. And I quote:

Why would we say to people that have spent their lifetime, most of them, building this province, making it what we [all] inherited, making it the most vibrant and wonderful province of Canada, why would we want to say to those people, oh you're old. You don't count any more. You're too old. You can't vote. You have no photo ID.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that same question to that member respecting his own party's policy. Why would you make your members show proof of residency? Why would you turn away new members of your party from choosing their candidate just because they did not have photo ID? We all know the reason why, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, why would the NDP turn seniors away that may not have photo ID and still want to be part of the political process?

Mr. Speaker, when you go to return an item at a big box store in this province, you have to show photo ID. We're talking about returning products, and yet the members opposite don't think it's right to have to prove residency, prove identification when you're voting — the most fundamental, democratic right in this country. Mr. Speaker, why are the NDP trying to further disenfranchise the disenfranchised through their own policies?

Another comment made by the member from Athabasca kind of made me wonder if he was aware of his own party policy. The member further states, "I go back to the whole notion of photo ID for voting, which I think is wrong to do." I ask the member for Athabasca: is your party doing the wrong thing when their own policies demand photo ID as proof of residency at their own nomination meetings? Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand why the NDP MLAs are flip-flopping on this issue every time they stand up in the legislature and oppose the idea of proof of residency. They are speaking out against their own party policies. This is ridiculous.

The member from Coronation Park does the exact same flip-flop as he carries on during debate on March 15th. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

We need to encourage them . . . we're not doing so when we are demanding photo ID. Because a photo ID . . . Also we are requiring a residence, two pieces of information that state what your residence is."

The member continues, "We're opposed for a whole . . . [variety] of reasons." Opposed to what? Integrity of a democratic process? Mr. Speaker, I know this may become a little repetitive, but how in the world can the NDP MLAs stand in their place and so blatantly speak out of both sides of their mouth, consistently and constantly flip-flopping on issues?

[11:30]

Who are they saying is wrong? The people of Saskatchewan want and deserve to know the reasons why the NDP members are opposed to proof of residency. Their own members do so when choosing candidates for an upcoming election. It is sad but true. Even our own motion for today had been tabled, the member from Rosemont continued to bash his own party policies.

There's a very real danger [I quote] that the clear

preference for photo identification could lead to some people and many people being disenfranchised. We are worried about this. We're going to fight against this, Mr. Speaker, and we see it as wrong-headed. [Good grief, Mr. Speaker.] We recognize that with the legislation that's put forward, it's going to be difficult for many to comply with . . . Thus it's going to be difficult for them to cast that vote . . .

I cannot believe that this member would speak out so vehemently against his own party nomination rules, which is exactly what we're talking about with the amendment. Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that the members from Rosemont, the one member from Rosemont, with all his passion has not resigned his NDP membership and decided to sit as an independent, that is if he really felt that the idea for voter to prove residency was so wrong, so simply wrong.

I would like to switch gears now. Part of the reasons why the NDP would have implemented a need for proof of residency within their own party. We all know that their current Leader of the Opposition would not have asked for this measure. He seems to enjoy some leeway in the area of membership sales. I wonder if it's all possible that sometime after the Leader of the Opposition became leader, around 1,100 members called up the provincial NDP Party and asked for more strict voting rules.

I know that this is one of many issues with respect to flip-flopping by the members of the opposition. As a result, I support the amendment put forward and decry the opposition provided by the members of the opposition. Thank you.

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to stand on behalf of the opposition caucus and just speak a little bit about an issue that we know a fair amount of. I've heard two members opposite, the member for Cannington and the member now for Wascana Plains, quoting from things I have said as recently as earlier this week. And I've heard both of them suggest that I don't know my own party's constitution.

A little bit of history, Mr. Speaker. In the early '90s we had a party constitution that dealt almost exclusively with this document, which is the NDP Party constitution. The convention in Saskatoon dealt almost exclusively with our party constitution because I challenged the Chair at that convention, and that led to virtually the entire constitution dealing with our party constitution. So please, Mr. Speaker, I beg government, Sask Party members, do not tell this member I don't understand my own party constitution.

By way of further explanation, I want to read what my NDP constitution says about nominations. And under section 5(f) it says, "The Executive shall," speaking about constituency organization executives:

(f) The Executive shall fix the date and location of the Annual Meeting of the Association and, with approval of the Provincial Executive, shall fix the date and location of a Nominating Convention when required.

(g) The Executive shall appoint a Nomination Rules Committee that shall prepare a set of rules which may include:

- (i) Nominees holding elected positions;
- (ii) Registration procedures;
- (iii) Balloting rules;
- (iv) Any other items.

These rules shall be subject to the approval of the Executive of the Constituency Association.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the NDP constitution says about the nomination process, so they don't need to tell us what our constitution, our party constitution says.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to some of the rules . . . I know the ones that were just read by the member for Regina Wascana Plains, and it's the rules for nomination in Regina Northeast that were recently followed, but what she conveniently missed was . . . She read rule 7. What she conveniently missed was rule 8 which says, "In cases where eligible voters are not able to provide written documentation to establish residency, an oath may be presented as a substitute for identification and proof of residency and age."

So we have provided, at every turn, an opportunity for an oath. That's what we're asking for in opposition with respect to *The Election Act* and the municipal election Act, is the simple opportunity for people to have that right to vote, to simply swear an oath, when . . . Preferable is, preferable is photo ID, but in the absence of that we will accept a SaskPower bill or a tax notice, two pieces of that type of ID, or you can simply swear an oath.

And in one of the other nomination rules that I have, it says that the party shall provide the means to do that right at the nominating convention, but it's in all cases at the discretion of the local constituency executive. And my experience has been, without fail, Mr. Speaker, that NDP constituency executives want to have every single person that should be eligible to vote, to be able to vote as easily as they can in an NDP nomination. Without fail, that's what we believe. That's what we stand for. I defy you to find anyone, any New Democrat that would say I have misrepresented my party, my membership, or our people.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very strange that the Government House Leader would move such a disingenuous motion. And my question on this motion which is:

That the Assembly call on the opposition NDP to support *The Election Amendment Act, 2010* and *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2010*, as they are precisely [this is a quote from the motion, as they are precisely] in line with NDP policies regarding constituency rules and regulations for the nominating process.

Mr. Speaker, I have just outlined irrevocably how that is patently not true. It is just not substantiated in any way, shape, or form.

I'm wondering how it is that the Sask Party Government House Leader can present such a complete fabrication that cannot be substantiated as fact, but how is it that I can't call that a lie or a

mistruth? How does that work? How is it that something can be fabricated by the Sask Party government, a complete fabrication, and yet I can't call it a mistruth or a lie?

When I've established some credentials as a very long-term . . . I'm in my 24th, soon 25 years as an NDP MLA. I have a long and proud history within my party. Some people say it dates back to before I was born, when my grandmother was an MLA in the forerunner of the NDP, the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation]. From '44 to '48 she was with Tommy Douglas's first government. Mr. Speaker, I have a long, deep, and abiding interest in politics in Saskatchewan, in making things better for the people of Saskatchewan. That's what I've tried to make a career of.

And I resent when a Sask Party government or anyone else tries to put falsehoods into our mouths and tries to misrepresent what a proud political organization, a proud movement the CCF — now NDP — what we stand for. We stand for people having the right to vote. And we want to make sure . . . All we ask is, allow, like we do, allow for the swearing in of voters when they . . . If they have photo ID, this is great. If they've got a couple of pieces of letters from a tax notice or SaskPower, SaskTel, so on, Mr. Speaker, that's fine . . .

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

Mr. Weekes: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I'd ask the member to state his point of order.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to raise a point of order. The member, the member said he knew the rules, and then they went ahead and indirectly called our side, our motion lies and that we were untruth. And I believe the member should withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening very carefully to what the member has said. And, Mr. Speaker, he's saying how, he's questioning how he cannot do that. He is not saying at all that the members opposite have in fact done that, Mr. Speaker. And I will ask you to review very carefully the wording prior to making a ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order. I've been listening very carefully. The member didn't direct his comments directly at any individual. The comments are directed . . . When members start to call other members as liars or having misrepresented what other members are is, as I understand, is how the rule applies. And I will certainly look at it but as I have been listening I do not find the point of order accurate. I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is clear, it is clear to me that the Sask Party government has no interest in seeing that a significant part of our population not be disenfranchised from voting. I've spoken about renters. I've spoken about the more than 3,000 individuals who are couch surfing in Regina alone, as we speak, that don't have what you would consider a fixed address, most of them through no fault of their own, Mr. Speaker.

How is it that we can have that situation, and yet the Sask Party government says, oh but, you know, you've got to have photo ID? Well can you have a photo ID when you don't have a fixed address? How is it that people with very minimal means, very minimal dollars . . . The government is saying you have to go out and spend 10 or \$20 or \$80 to get a passport so that you will have photo ID so you can vote.

Mr. Speaker, late last week I spoke to a constituent who was in tears because she didn't know how she was going to make it to the end of this very month with respect to food. And she's a frugal constituent. She was in tears. She did not know how she'd meet the end of the month, and to ask that person to spend 10 or 20 or some other amount of dollars just to get a photo ID is outrageous. It's outlandish. That represents several days of food for a person that has too much month at the end of the pay as it is, Mr. Speaker. And the government doesn't seem to get it. They just don't understand. This is a Saskatchewan for the wealthy only and the rest be damned.

Mr. Speaker, it is shameful. I want to finish my remarks by saying once again, as irrevocably as I can, I resent it when a Sask Party government tries to pretend they know what my New Democratic Party constitution says. I resent it when they say that we on this side don't know what our party constitution says or what our party's nominations rules say, or that, worse yet, that we don't understand what NDP members across this proud province feel and think.

Mr. Speaker, they should rethink the election Acts, both of them. They should allow for an oath, a swearing in of voters, and that would solve the problem.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Request leave to introduce a very special guest.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Rosemont has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, seated in the east gallery, Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce a special guest that I see seated up here today and has stopped in, I suspect, to observe proceedings here today. And that's His Worship, Mayor Don Shirley from Carlyle, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to welcome Don to his Assembly.

I know that specifically Don has served his community with integrity for many years, both as a lineman with SaskPower and now as mayor. And he's presided over a period of time with significant growth for that community and has done so with a steady hand and with vision and with exceptional organization required for the community.

I've seen Mr. Shirley's response in action as the community was under great strain, Mr. Speaker, when baseball-size hail devastated the community this summer, Mr. Speaker. And that steady hand and the principles and service to his community certainly reflects the way that Mr. Shirley conducts himself.

I ask all members of this Assembly to join with me in welcoming His Worship, Mayor Don Shirley of Carlyle to his Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

[11:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Voting Eligibility Requirements (continued)

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on the motion brought forward by the member from Cannington, the Government House Leader, and I will be supporting this motion.

A few things I want to point out, Mr. Speaker. Just some brief remarks about *The Election Amendment Act* of 2010. It will introduce and enhance voter identification requirements, including the use of approved photo ID. If you do not have approved photo ID, you will be required to show additional forms of ID to prove your identity and your ordinary residence, or to have another voter vouch for you.

So clearly, Mr. Speaker, there is ample opportunity for voters without specific ID as a driver's licence to prove their identification as well as their place of residence. We see that voters already are required to show approved ID in order to vote in federal elections and in provincial elections, including British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. It's appropriate that Saskatchewan move to meet the evolving national standards in this respect, Mr. Speaker, and to improve the voter integrity and voting integrity of this fair country.

They will be required to show identification prior to voting. Those with approved, government-issued photo ID will need to show only that ID in order to get a ballot. However those without that ID will be required to show additional forms of ID or be required to have another voter with such ID vouch for them. And each one can vouch for only one voter, Mr. Speaker. So we see ample opportunity to make sure that these people are ensured their right to vote.

To ensure that voters are not inappropriately disenfranchised by this change, we'll be authorizing in the regulations a broad range of supplementary information that may be used to establish identity and ordinary residence for a voter. We'll be starting with the review of the existing federal list for such information and are currently conducting consultations to identify any additional forms of Saskatchewan information that would be of local assistance. So, Mr. Speaker, clearly all this is intended to do is preserve the integrity of this process, as is alignment with many other provinces, and are the direction that our municipalities would like to head in this province, Mr. Speaker, as well as federally.

Now clearly this position taken by the New Democratic Party is hypocritical. Disenfranchising people is not the intent of this government, nor do I think this legislation would do that. I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, the 1,100 people in Meadow Lake, if they feel disenfranchised.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to a comment made by the member from Dewdney: everyone has a right to vote. And I couldn't agree with him more, Mr. Speaker. I agree that everybody should be able to vote once and in their own constituency and have that opportunity to do that. And this legislation clearly would help that happen.

I want to refer anecdotally to a little story that I heard. A friend of mine who — I think he supports me but I know he has a lot of friends in the New Democratic Party — happened to be at a church service that was being ministered by the former premier, Mr. Calvert, a very respected man and he continues to be respected in this province today.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Calvert, he told a little story about geese and flocks of geese. And he said, you know, quite often you have flocks of geese and they have a leader, but sometimes someone that isn't a leader wants to be the leader of that flock, so they'll go out and they'll sell memberships to geese that aren't geese. You might sell memberships to ducks. They don't even want to be a goose but they end up getting a goose membership although they're ducks. So you know, Mr. Speaker, this will just ensure that those ducks that have photo ID don't have to be geese, they continue to be ducks. And those geese with photo ID can be geese.

Most individuals referred to by the members opposite about, you know, with reference to being disenfranchised, clearly already have ID. I can't remember, Mr. Speaker, which member across referred to university students for example going back and forth to university, driving back and forth, and how were they supposed to pay for this ID. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue if they're driving, they likely have photo ID. I think many of these people would have ID, that we're questioning. If not photo ID, they will have, as I described earlier in some of the key points in this legislation, they will have opportunity to prove their ID through a voucher, of somebody vouching for them, Mr. Speaker, on an individual basement, or other forms of ID that they would have on their person, which most people do.

And you know, I've run into many people already that are going to provincial elections, and when they show up, they produce their photo ID, some form of ID. And they are quite surprised when they don't have to. Many residents believe they should, and at this time, they don't have to. And they're more than willing to do that.

So, Mr. Speaker, another point that I heard, I think it was the member from Coronation Park as he kind of meandered around the issue, he talked about those couch surfers and the people that don't have an address. Well, Mr. Speaker, although it may be a bit onerous for them, the opportunity is there to get enumerated. And once enumerated, that covers that problem, Mr. Speaker. They're more than able to vote once and in their own riding.

As well, Mr. Speaker, people on social assistance, as pointed out by the Minister of Social Services, that in the case where somebody on social assistance does not have the means with which to get their own photo ID, Social Services will provide the funds and will help them to do that and get them through the process. So, Mr. Speaker, clearly some of the arguments offered by the members opposite just don't hold any water whatsoever.

And again this process, this legislation will align us not only federally but the direction that municipalities want to go and the direction many provinces in our great nation of Canada have already gone, Mr. Speaker.

Now I've pointed out this hypocritical decision is only one example of many such, I guess, opportunities to speak that we'll see the New Democratic Party representatives talk about. My friend, the member from Cannington, and the member from Wascana, they pointed out a lot of the intricacies of this legislation. I won't delve too much into that. They pointed out the intricacies of the nomination process and the rules around that within the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker. I won't delve into that too much. But what I will do is take this opportunity to point out some of the NDP flip-flops that we've seen over the past number of years. And I'll step through those as quickly as I can. I know my time's coming quickly to a close here.

What do they say in opposition? Well they are asking the opposition . . . pardon me. In opposition, the New Democrats are asking the Saskatchewan Party government to reinstate spot loss hail coverage for crop insurance. They're calling for the government to stand up for livestock producers in Saskatchewan in this time of crisis. What did they do in government, Mr. Speaker? They cut spot loss hail coverage in 2002, and they continually raised the crop insurance premiums while lowering coverage.

Cattle prices were at a lower level in October of 2007 than in October 2008, but the NDP had not one mention of supporting livestock producers in their platform.

In reference to municipal affairs, Mr. Speaker, what did they say in opposition? What are they saying in opposition? They're telling the Saskatchewan Party government that they must implement immediate property tax relief for the people of Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's clearly happening.

They are saying the Saskatchewan Party government is shortchanging municipalities by not putting in place a long-term revenue-sharing deal. Again, that is happening.

They're also saying municipalities received more funding under the NDP government. That was in a news release of February 7th of '07. Well, Mr. Speaker, what did they do when they were in government? They promised a property tax relief since 1944 when Tommy Douglas promised to do away with it. Never happened. Under the NDP, Saskatchewan paid the highest level of property tax in the country. And the Minister of Finance pointed out very well yesterday the 17 different occasions and when the NDP raised taxes in this province over the last number of years.

During the 16 years of NDP government, municipalities were

shortchanged by \$600 million. The only time that the NDP actually raised revenue sharing was — when? — 2007, an election year, Mr. Speaker. And we can clearly see what the intent behind that was.

In opposition, when it comes to corporate services, in January of '09, the NDP questioned the frequency of Saskatchewan Party cabinet ministers' travel as well as the amount spent by the ministers. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's look at that record. The Saskatchewan Party travel expenses from April 1st to November 30th of '08 — \$554,000 and change. The same time frame in '06-07, the NDP spent almost \$670,000. And we're not even counting in the factor of inflation there, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism, parks, culture, and sport, opposition NDP claim the Saskatchewan Party government is making camping less affordable for people across the province. However when in government, they instituted the wiener roast tax that clearly made camping more expensive.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have examples here that are just too numerous to go through, through education, through First Nations and Métis Relations, through health. The record is very clear, Mr. Speaker. There's just not enough time to go through it all. So with that, I will just bring my comments to a close and say that I will be supporting this motion brought forward by the member from Cannington, the Government House Leader.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in this debate. And I want to ask one very simple question of the Sask Party government: why are you putting in this new rule where people have to have photo ID to vote? Who asked you to do it? Where did it come from? Why are you doing it? And, Mr. Speaker, there's been no answers.

They talk about integrity. They talk about having a better system. And, Mr. Speaker, the real truth is they don't want people that live in our Aboriginal communities, they don't want seniors, they don't want people that move to Saskatchewan, they don't want these people to have any vote and any determination on how they select their MLAs. That is the pure truth, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what this Bill is all about.

Now I listen to and I watch what a few members are saying, Mr. Speaker. And before I go there, I want to say to the Minister of Justice — and I'm glad that he's here today — indicating to him that, as he is the Minister of Justice, that word is so important to the people of Saskatchewan is justice. And, Mr. Speaker, most people that I know have a high regard for people that are in the legal profession. But how could the Minister of Justice, the person representing many, many legal professions, professionals throughout the province of Saskatchewan, support a Bill like this?

And forever and a day until I leave this Assembly, until I leave this earth, I'm going to remember the name of the Justice minister that put this Bill forward that disenfranchised many, many of my people in northern Saskatchewan and throughout many of the First Nations communities and cities throughout this great province. Mr. Speaker, he was the one that took away the right from many of these people to vote. And forever and a

day, if there's one thing I'm going to remember from this party and this Justice minister is that he took away the right to vote for many people of Saskatchewan that simply do not have a photo identification when they go and vote, Mr. Speaker.

Now the member from Regina Wascana Plains talked about the integrity of the system. And, Mr. Speaker, I understood prior to her role as an MLA, she was a police officer. And, Mr. Speaker, based on her experience, she should know. She probably went into many, many homes dealing with many crises where she found seven or eight, nine or ten adults living in one house. They may have found two or three young people couch surfing. And many times I know the police reports, throughout the major centres and through many centres, they mentioned somebody's name of no fixed address, Mr. Speaker. She knows how many people out there have no fixed address.

And, Mr. Speaker, no matter how you cut it, this Bill and this action is purely intended to displace the Aboriginal community, the elders, the immigrant community, and those people that don't have proper ID from voting in the next provincial election, Mr. Speaker. That's pure and simple what this is.

And what is astounding to me, Mr. Speaker, what is actually astounding to me is that they would stand in this House, many of them, and defend that. How could they do that? How could they in their good conscience get up and say, this is good for Saskatchewan? We know what it is. The Aboriginal community knows what it is. The immigrant communities know what it is. And, Mr. Speaker, the elders know what it is.

And one of the things that often is astounding to me is how they do something as incredibly, as incredibly undemocratic as this, then turn around and still try and blame the NDP for doing this. Now how does that work, Mr. Speaker?

And come next election, I'm going to tell the people wherever I go, the Aboriginal community, the immigrant community, the elderly people, and many people that are disenfranchised as a result of this Bill, is they're taking away your right to vote. And the reason why they want to take away your right to vote is because you don't vote for the Sask Party to begin with. And that's how you gerrymander the electoral process, and that's how you destroy, you destroy democracy, Mr. Speaker.

Now what I can't understand is how a former officer of the law and how a Justice minister can stand up and talk about, this is right; this improves the integrity of the system. How can they do that, Mr. Speaker, when they know full well this is going to hurt the democratic process that many people participate, that they have been engaged with throughout their careers, Mr. Speaker. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed that they would stand up and they would defend that, this Bill, saying that it's right. How could they stand in their place and say this is right? This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, wherever you go, the Aboriginal community — I'll take that one example because of my background — they can influence 22 provincial constituencies, 22 provincial constituencies at next election. And, Mr. Speaker, we're having a difficult time getting more and more people, Aboriginal people, to participate in the election process. Come on board, come and vote, we tell the First Nations community. Now this

Saskatchewan Party is saying to people, but before you vote, you've got to have photo ID and you've got to show where you live.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I find that absolutely astounding. We should be going the absolute other direction and making it easier and easier for people to vote. And what we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that none of that evidence is there, that the Saskatchewan Party want these people to vote.

[12:00]

And I mentioned at the outset, I am ashamed to see this kind of action being proposed by that government. And I'm particularly ashamed of the people that stand up and purport to talk about integrity when they know full well this is going to hurt a lot of people from coming out and voting and taking their rightful part in the democratic system, Mr. Speaker. This is intended to hurt and to limit their opportunity to choose a new government. They know it. We know it. And many other people out . . . [inaudible] . . . Saskatchewan know it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, is that justice? Is that justice? The answer is no. Nowhere in . . . [inaudible] . . . what they're trying to do, nor justify what they're trying . . . That's not justice. The member from Wascana Plains goes up and says, oh, we want to improve the integrity. Again, I go back, how many people did she go see in different homes and noticed the overcrowding? And how many people have they seen couch surfing? And how many people have they seen with no fixed address? You've probably seen thousands of people throughout your career. Now you're saying they don't have a right to vote. How does that improve the integrity? It doesn't improve the integrity one bit, one bit. And I'm ashamed again to point out that this government put this Bill in place that hurts many, many people, that disenfranchises and destroys democracy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they know full well that they're defending the indefensible. They know that full well. And that's one of the reasons why I'm ashamed today to see people that have come from careers that impact many of the people that we're talking about today and yet they continue to prop up the most basic fundamental problem that they're going to present to these people — and that's giving them no right to vote, no right to choose their government. And, Mr. Speaker, that is shameful.

In Ottawa, when they tried this thing back several years ago, there was an estimation of 10 million people that would not vote as a result of their request for voter ID. And, Mr. Speaker, that's 10 million across Canada. Now what does that mean, what does that mean to Saskatchewan when we have a low turnout in the First Nations communities as it is, we have a lower turnout in many of the Aboriginal communities and, Mr. Speaker, we have a low turnout when it comes to elderly people and to the immigrant community.

And they know it, Mr. Speaker. Now they want to make it even lower. And the reason why is because these group of people do not vote for them. And what do you do when you want to win an election? You gerrymander the process, and you hide it under the banner of integrity. Well I'm sorry; we don't buy that one bit. We don't buy that one bit because that's exactly what people out there know is the net effect, and that's exactly what

they know this government's up to.

So, Mr. Speaker, let their names live in infamy as it comes to the whole process of trying to push and to have the democratic process very, very strong. They are working opposite of it. They don't want to see it enhanced. They want to see less voter turnout and one of the best ways to do that is say, okay to all . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed on the 65-minute debate. We will now enter the 10-minute question period. I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP has railed on and on against the photo ID provision in both *The Local Government Election Amendment Act* and *The Election Amendment Act*, even though it reflects current practices within the NDP's own nomination process. To the member from Regina Dewdney: are you aware that these two Acts are virtually identical to your party's constituency association's own proof of identity rules?

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to tell the member just how wrong he really is and set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, our constitution is clear that each of the constituencies have the opportunity to make the rules, set the rules up for each constituency nomination, Mr. Speaker. And in nowhere, nowhere does it say that photo identification is required, Mr. Speaker. Nowhere, Mr. Speaker, would it determine that photo identification is required to vote in an NDP nomination.

Mr. Speaker, just to let you know what the process is, Mr. Speaker, the provincial office provides an updated list of those who have memberships right up to that date. If your name's on that list, Mr. Speaker . . . And anybody that has the right to vote, Mr. Speaker, name is on that list because the cut-off is, it has to be a minimum of seven days before the nomination, Mr. Speaker. So the names are on, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a situation where the members opposite are trying to make something that isn't really there.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The Sask Party's failed many people in this province, Mr. Speaker, maybe no more so though than the MLA from Cannington and this Premier in that region, specifically as it relates to their failure to provide the health services that are required. Specifically we could reference the closing of many beds, five beds in Deer View Lodge, Mr. Speaker, in Wawota, or the failures in long-term care in White Bear or in Carlyle, Mr. Speaker.

Now we see a Bill that disenfranchises many young people, First Nations, and seniors from voting in the next election, Mr. Speaker. Question to the MLA from Cannington who has failed seniors, families, First Nations, and communities across his constituency: how can he defend this deliberate attempt at

preventing many from voting in the next election?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of the Cannington constituency, and especially Wawota, are well served by this government even though the NDP closed the acute care facility there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to the comments from the member from Athabasca, he said he was ashamed, and I agree that he should be. I'd like to read you a quote from March 16th, page 6760 from the member from Athabasca, and I quote, "And we're going to come here with guns ablazing, and we're going to tell people exactly what they got to do . . ."

Mr. Speaker, this is a call to violence and intimidation, a threat by the member from Athabasca, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it threatens this institution and it threatens the people within this building and the visitors, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, no honourable member of this Assembly would make those threats against this institution.

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

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *The Local Government Election Amendment Act* and *The Election Amendment Act* are virtually identical to the NDP's constituency association nomination rules. To the member from Regina Coronation Park: why are these rules good enough for your membership but not good enough for the people of Saskatchewan?

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my speech, that is absolutely not true. It's a fabrication of the Sask Party government. Read the record. Read my speech and the member will know that our party constitution does not say that nor do the rules of either of the two nominations . . . constituency. Unlike the Devine gerrymander of the 1980s where we saw a situation where the constituencies in Saskatchewan . . . There's a divergence of up to four times from the smallest constituency was a Conservative constituency. The largest, with four times the voters, Mr. Speaker, was an NDP constituency. That's the things that we have always had to fight is untruth, fabrications from right wing governments. Shame on you. When will you learn?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the member from the Wascana Plains constituency. Murray Mandryk's October 30th column referred to this whole notion of the photo ID as, and I quote, "A dopey idea." Does she agree with that?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Tell: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say first off that the people

of Saskatchewan want their government to ensure integrity of the voting process. Mr. Speaker, what they don't want is a party — the members opposite — that speak out of both sides of their mouths on most issues and a party of members opposite who oppose the integrity of the voting process.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP has spent considerable effort in this House arguing against two Bills that are virtually identical to the NDP's own nomination rules in many of their constituencies.

To the member from Regina Coronation Park: will you now vote for this legislation or change the nomination rules in your constituency associations?

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the government members who have spoken. I think unanimously, all of them fabricating a lie about what the NDP, about what the NDP constitution . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. I would ask . . . Order. I would ask the member from Regina Coronation Park to be careful of the wording he uses in his responses.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Methinks that government members protest too much about what our nomination rules say. They are very clear. We've read them into the record, the parts that affect us. They have read portions of misquotes into it. Mr. Speaker, it is just a shame that the Sask Party feel that desperate about elections that they have to misdirect what the NDP constitution says; misdirect what we say about our nomination process run by constituency organizations. Thank you.

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the member from Cannington, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, even before this debate started, the member from Cannington put out a press release that says that the New Democratic Party requires photo identification, Mr. Speaker. Even the document from a single nominating convention, Mr. Speaker, says it would be preferred, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question to the member is: was that intentional or was that a mistake?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the rules for Regina Northeast NDP — rules for nomination — I have here, Mr. Speaker, it says, "For the purposes of proving residency, a driver's licence or comparable government-issued photo identification is preferred. However the following is also acceptable . . ." and they list other government documents.

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we're doing in this piece of legislation. If you cannot provide photo ID, there is a long, long

list of other IDs which will be acceptable, Mr. Speaker. These rules that we're putting in place in *The Election Act* are virtually carbon copies to what this constituency association is doing, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, they're arguing against their own rules.

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

Mr. Bradshaw: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP's duplicity is well documented. They shut down 52 hospitals to supposedly protect rural health care. They used back-to-work legislation in order to defend the rights of striking SaskPower workers and nurses. They also presumed that not increasing the seniors' income plan would help seniors cope during the 41 per cent rise in the consumer price index.

To the member from Athabasca: will you admit that your opposition to *The Local Government Election Amendment Act* and *The Election Amendment Act* is rooted entirely in the ignorance of your party's own nomination policies?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Well, Mr. Speaker, given the unprecedented revenues left to you guys and the people, and the money you're getting today, when we form government we'll do exactly what is fair to the people of Saskatchewan, and that is make sure we got a good investment to health care, Mr. Speaker. And when we get government, we'll do the work that's necessary.

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

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to know how it is that couch surfers are supposed to have photo ID when they don't know from night to night where home is going to be.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Seventy-five minute debate has elapsed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 2 — Housing

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Mr. Forbes.]

The Speaker: — Order. The member has moved the motion and therefore the member has given up his place to speak. I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to enter into this debate. Mr. Speaker, today we're talking about providing for people in our society the opportunity to have a meaningful home, Mr. Speaker, whether it be provided through rent or whether it be provided

through homeownership, Mr. Speaker, and how citizens of our province have the opportunity to pay for that rent, Mr. Speaker, or to ever be able to afford that home.

Mr. Speaker, today many, many citizens in our province live at income levels that don't give them the opportunity to have both the right to own a home and to pay their bills, Mr. Speaker. And many, many citizens today, as a result of inflationary costs, Mr. Speaker, that this government has done very little or nothing to address, cannot, cannot, Mr. Speaker — and I want just to stress that from a very, very common point of view of many citizens of this province — they cannot afford to both have a quality residence, Mr. Speaker, and pay their bills. Pay the fundamentals of electricity and heating, Mr. Speaker, provide food and, in many cases, can't buy the medications they need in order to have a healthy life, Mr. Speaker. We're making citizens choose between the ability to have a quality, a quality home, Mr. Speaker, and to be able to live with dignity and respect in our communities.

[12:15]

Mr. Speaker, that's a shameful situation when today citizens, who have seen their rent increase up to \$400 over the last year, Mr. Speaker, and that have seen their utility rates go up, have seen their drug costs go up, have seen gasoline go up, Mr. Speaker, citizens cannot afford the basic costs of living in our rich society, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, what are we hearing in response? I'm hearing in response, Mr. Speaker, that 92,000 people were taken off the tax brackets, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be honest what that means realistically to people. Mr. Speaker, it means that many of those people who came off the tax brackets from one year to the next may be getting as low as a dollar or two or three dollars more per year, and that's all, Mr. Speaker. That is all some of them get. On the high end they may get a few hundred dollars a year, Mr. Speaker, from the previous year because as a result of the changes of income tax and the bracket creep, Mr. Speaker. And they're bragging about the fact that a few people get a few extra dollars, Mr. Speaker, when their rent has gone up \$400 a month.

Mr. Speaker, that's not responsible of a government. Mr. Speaker, that's not responsible of a society, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at the fundamental problems people face in our society and we need to address them, Mr. Speaker. Today there are far too many citizens of our province that have no home at all, that live in shelters when a shelter bed's available. But if a shelter bed isn't available, Mr. Speaker, where do they sleep? On a park bench, in a park, under a bridge, Mr. Speaker, in a field? Mr. Speaker, that's not acceptable in a province or a society that has the wealth that we have in this province.

The problem is, Mr. Speaker, this government has done nothing to address these fundamental concerns of the citizens of our province. And, Mr. Speaker, the net result is that today more individuals are couch surfing, are living on the street, living without a residence, without an acceptable place to live, without a house, without a home, Mr. Speaker. And we need to address this fundamental problem.

And, Mr. Speaker, the government is ignoring it. In 2007 the

former New Democratic Party government put \$100 million into an affordable housing strategy. Mr. Speaker, what did the incoming government do? Well they froze the spending of that money which was already transferred to the Sask Housing Corporation, Mr. Speaker. They froze the spending of that money for a full year so they would then claim the very projects that were under way and being built by the previous government. They claimed them as their own. Did they put any new money in? Did they do anything to help? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. They did nothing. But what did they do? They delayed the construction of new housing by a year so they could claim it as their own, Mr. Speaker.

Well that's not just irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, it's downright wrong. And, Mr. Speaker, since then, in what they by their own definition — and I'm saying their own definition — is good economic times, Mr. Speaker, what are we seeing? Are we seeing a significant improvement in affordable housing to deal with the problem that's emerging in our communities, Mr. Speaker? No, we're not. And that's fundamentally wrong. People have a right, Mr. Speaker, to live with dignity and respect in our communities, Mr. Speaker. They have a right to be able to afford housing and a place to live and to be able to pay their bills.

Mr. Speaker, every one of us in this Assembly should be ashamed of the fact that people in our communities have to live on the street, that people can't get adequate housing. Mr. Speaker, we live in one of the wealthiest countries with the most potential in the entire world. So why in a country with all the potential we have, with all the resources we have, with all the opportunity we have, do we have people living on the street, not able to feed themselves, not able to look after themselves because they don't have proper accommodation?

Without proper accommodation, it's difficult to get employment, Mr. Speaker. And even if you've got employment today and you've got minimum wage employment, Mr. Speaker, you don't make enough money to be able to afford the rent, the food, and the utilities you'd need to have a place to live. That's sad, Mr. Speaker. That is sad in one of the wealthiest countries in the world with some of the most vast resource opportunity in the world, Mr. Speaker. We're letting people down.

It's the responsibility of government, it is the responsibility of government to help those who need help, Mr. Speaker. Now everybody would like to be the individual who is wealthy and has every opportunity in the world, has every opportunity to get ahead and, Mr. Speaker, live like I would say all of us in this Assembly do. We have homes, Mr. Speaker. We can pay our bills. Our children have the opportunity to go to university. Our children have the opportunity to get ahead. Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate. We're fortunate and our children and our grandchildren have benefited from that. But we also have a responsibility to those who can't live to those standards. We have an obligation to those people, Mr. Speaker.

We should be judged by how we help those who have the least, Mr. Speaker, not how we help those who have the most. Now I'm not saying, Mr. Speaker, that we create a society where everybody gets everything for nothing. I'm not suggesting that all. Not at all, Mr. Speaker. I'm suggesting that we put true

effort into making our society better for all people, that we endeavour to use the vast resources and wealth of this province to ensure that people have minimums, Mr. Speaker, so they can live with dignity and respect.

Every one of us should want every citizen to live with dignity and respect and have the opportunity to get ahead. Every single one of us should want that. And I'm not going to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there are members who don't want that. I think where we have a difference, Mr. Speaker, is in what priority that is and the priorities the government sets, Mr. Speaker, the priority a government sets for its communities, for its society, and for its people.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go to one simple thing. I'm going to go to potash resource royalties, Mr. Speaker. When the royalties were set at \$130 a tonne, Mr. Speaker, we were receiving about 30 per cent of the income in royalty, the people of Saskatchewan were, for the resource that they own. Today when we're receiving \$400 a tonne, over \$400 a tonne for that same resource, we get the same amount of money and we get less than 5 per cent, less than 5 per cent on the dollar, Mr. Speaker. And if we were today getting that 30 per cent that was originally set in place for a return, Mr. Speaker, we'd be getting a little over \$2 billion more per year. That \$2 billion per year, Mr. Speaker, could be used to help those in our society who need help the most. And I would think all of us should have that as a goal, to help those individuals. And Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is set priorities to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, today we need probably in the neighbourhood of 10,000 affordable housing units or additional housing units in the province of Saskatchewan for low-income people, for people who don't have the opportunity to make the levels of income you would need to buy a home today. I want to use a common sense example, Mr. Speaker. Just five years ago, you could buy a three-bedroom bungalow in the city of Regina or the city of Saskatoon for somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200 to \$250,000. Today that same bungalow is between 4 and \$500,000 — double the price, Mr. Speaker. Well that put home ownership out of the price range of literally tens of thousands of Saskatchewan's young adults who are moving into the workforce, forcing them to stay in rental accommodation years longer than they would have prior to that increase in price of housing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying, I'm not saying that that's necessarily bad that you have market changes and that. But if you're going to have market changes like that, you have to adapt your society, your availability, and your strategy in order to deal with those young adults who are now having to remain in the rental community longer because they can't get into home ownership as early as they could have. It's still the goal I think of every young adult who is out in the work world, who wants to get married and raise a family and contribute to our society, home ownership is still their ultimate goal or one of their ultimate goals, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to say it's the only one, but I think it's what each and every adult in our society would like. They like ownership.

Now through forces outside anything that they can control, we've seen an inflation in housing, we've seen 100 per cent increase in a very short period of time. Now those factors are

real, they're going to occur, but what we have to do is adjust our strategies, realizing that somebody that may have got into home ownership at 25 years of age five years ago, may not be getting into home ownership till 32 or 33 years of age today. And as a result you have a balloon in the rental market across the province, Mr. Speaker. And those young adults who are having to rent, Mr. Speaker, are in a situation where they need shelter. They need housing. And we have to adjust our strategy to provide a greater number of rental accommodations in the province, Mr. Speaker.

And we also have to adjust our strategy as you put more rental accommodation into the market, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the quality of that housing is sustained over the period of time, Mr. Speaker, that existing landlords are required to keep a standard of housing, Mr. Speaker. And I know we have programs to do that, but we have to be more diligent in ensuring, Mr. Speaker, that people who are renting accommodations are able to rent quality accommodations so that their children, their children in fact can grow up in a home that's healthy, Mr. Speaker, free of mould and infestation.

And I'm not suggesting all homes are full of infestation, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to suggest that for a second or suggest that landlords are bad landlords, Mr. Speaker. But I'm just saying you have to establish standards, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that children, our future generations grow up in what is seen as and actually is, Mr. Speaker, quality housing because those things make a fundamental difference to the future of that child, their ability to, Mr. Speaker, to learn, their ability to grow, Mr. Speaker, their health, Mr. Speaker.

Things that are important should be important to all of us, are certainly important to their parents and their grandparents but also, Mr. Speaker, should be equally important to each and every one of us that are elected on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to represent them. It doesn't matter which side of the House you're sitting on, Mr. Speaker; we're elected to represent the people of Saskatchewan. And we're elected to undertake on their behalf the establishment of rules and policies and principles, Mr. Speaker, that are there to benefit the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that, as some would like to say from my discussion at the end of this hour, Mr. Speaker, that I'm saying the government should be all things to all people. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying: as the circumstances change, and they have changed rather dramatically over the last five or six years in Saskatchewan because of economic growth and for good reasons, but we have to adjust our strategy to deal with the problems that come with that growth. And, Mr. Speaker, we haven't done that.

We've tried to, on one side, continue to operate as we've always operated. And at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we've seen a significant change in the rental accommodation and the housing stock available to the people in Saskatchewan, partly because of change in demand because of the cost and partly, Mr. Speaker, because the fact that some of the standards have slipped over the last few years, Mr. Speaker. Because of the high demand, people are . . . There's continuous occupation of all rental properties because of the high demand and the low availability, Mr. Speaker, that there hasn't been the repairs done

necessarily on all properties that should be done. And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, it's because landlords are trying to ensure that people have someplace to live, Mr. Speaker. I'm not blaming all the landlords or saying they're bad people. But when you've got a near zero per cent vacancy rate, Mr. Speaker — or the other way to say it is near 100 per cent occupancy rate — you need to make adjustments in how you look at the problems in order to solve them. Now, Mr. Speaker, we haven't been able to do that.

[12:30]

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that we need to do is we need to examine whether our own programs that we deliver as a society, as a government are adequate for those people who are dependent upon those programs. Are our social assistance programs adequate? Is our housing supplement program adequate, Mr. Speaker? And do they need to be adjusted now? Now to have adjusted them a year ago or 18 months ago, you know, I commend any government anywhere in the world who does, that makes adjustments. But you have to continue to make adjustments as the demand changes, as the circumstances change.

And, Mr. Speaker, in this province today we spend \$4 billion — I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker — \$4 billion more than we did just three years ago. In 2007, the last New Democratic Party budget, was \$7.2 billion, Mr. Speaker. Today we're spending better than \$11 billion. And with all that, with all that increased expenditure and opportunity, Mr. Speaker, there are many, many families, many children and seniors that don't have as good a quality of life as they did when we only had \$7 billion to spend.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's because we haven't changed our policies, our directions, our priorities to ensure that people are first, people are first. We need to put our citizens first. We need to care enough to say that maybe, maybe a road doesn't get built this year that goes by my friend's farm because we're going to put people first.

Government is about making choices. Governing is about making choices. Never easy choices, Mr. Speaker, because there is always, regardless how much money you will ever have, there will always be more demand than there is funds available. But governing is about choices, Mr. Speaker, and we need, collectively we need to make the choices on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan that are going to benefit the people of Saskatchewan.

I don't think there's a single citizen in this province, Mr. Speaker, that wouldn't like to be a millionaire and have every opportunity. If you find me one, Mr. Speaker, I'd be concerned. But I can tell you this: very, very few ever get that opportunity. And very, very few ever have a day go by that they, in their own lives, don't have to make a difficult choice; they have to make a decision. And those decisions affect the next day and the next day and the day after that, Mr. Speaker, because we all have limited resources. So if I choose to spend money on one thing on a Monday, I may not have the money to make a choice on Friday. That's where most citizens of our province are at. They have to budget. They have to make choices. And, Mr. Speaker, yes, they have to do without things. They have to do

without things, and in many cases today people are doing without things they shouldn't have to do without.

Mr. Speaker, this becomes more acute in consideration when we look at the future generation of children. Mr. Speaker, doing the right thing today presents the opportunity for those children of tomorrow to get that good start in life, to get that quality education they need; to go home every day to ensure that they have a meal in their stomach, Mr. Speaker, that they're not hungry, they don't go to bed hungry at night; that they get the adequate dental care they need, Mr. Speaker, because at an early age dental care makes a difference to the quality of one's teeth and, Mr. Speaker, there's dental hygiene and care for the rest of their life.

Mr. Speaker, many things done at an earlier intervention stage make a tremendous difference in the outcome of a child — their capabilities, their desires, their own outlook on the future, Mr. Speaker. So we need to ensure that every child in our society gets to reach their maximum potential, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about it from a point of view of children meeting their maximum potential. Mr. Speaker, I saw on Monday morning . . . or Tuesday morning, pardon me, Mr. Speaker, on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] television, a young family being evicted from their home because, Mr. Speaker, they couldn't pay their rent because they weren't eligible for a housing supplement because the home they were renting wasn't of an adequate standard to get a housing supplement. Had they got that housing supplement, they could have afforded to pay the rent.

So, Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday a family's evicted. Today they have no home. A mother and a father and two children couch surfing, moving from friends' and relatives' homes, looking for where their next home will be.

For those two young children, Mr. Speaker, to try to put it in some perspective, those two young children don't have the security of knowing where their home is every night. Where are they going to sleep every night? They don't have the security of knowing, Mr. Speaker, that they will go to the same school, Mr. Speaker. That child doesn't have that security they need in order to reach their maximum potential. And I don't blame the parents, Mr. Speaker. I blame the fact that we have not done our job as legislators to ensure that we maximize the potential: maximize the potential of that child, maximize the potential of our society, our province in the interests of every child like those two children.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I don't expect we're ever going to have a perfect world. I don't expect we're ever going to be able to ensure that every single person meets their true potential, that every single person has every opportunity that any of us would like to have. But, Mr. Speaker, we can do much more. And it is about choices. And today in our society in this province, one of the richest in the world with a vast resource base, Mr. Speaker, too many families are hurting. Too many children are doing without. Too many seniors have to decide between buying their medications and paying their rent and utilities, Mr. Speaker. And that is fundamentally wrong. We all are elected by the citizens of this province to provide for those in our communities and to assist in providing for those in our

communities in all circumstances.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going through a good time, and it's been good economically for us. It's been good for business development. It's been good and those are all good things. Those are not bad things.

But one of the results of it is a tremendous increase in housing affordability on the home ownership side, which any of those of us who own their homes — and I would say that's every one of us in this Assembly — we benefited from it because we got the equity that came with our properties virtually doubling in value. We all got the equity. The problem comes with the next generation, our children and our grandchildren, who want to own the same homes we do, Mr. Speaker. And in many cases our children, just by virtue of the opportunities, are better educated, more worldly, have greater opportunities ahead of them than any of us do.

But, Mr. Speaker, they're facing a world where many of them get out of school with huge student loans and student debt. Mr. Speaker, they've gone to post-secondary education which they immediately have to start repaying, Mr. Speaker. They're faced with rents and home affordability. If you ever want to own a home, that's outside the market to a much later stage in their life, Mr. Speaker, unless you're fortunate enough that your parents have enough money to help you. But without that help, home ownership is probably outside your reach for a good 7 to 10 years longer than it would have been otherwise.

So, Mr. Speaker, what can we do about these things? Well we can develop policies and we can put money . . . I guess to put it short, we can put our money where our mouth is, Mr. Speaker. We can step up to the plate and we can do something about it. But what's it going to cost? Well the reality is it's not cheap. The reality is if we wanted to provide affordable housing for those who today can't afford it, it's probably in the neighbourhood of several hundred million dollars. And, Mr. Speaker, it couldn't be done overnight anyway. It would have to be done over several years for the simple reason that you can't . . . it takes time to build. Infrastructure isn't built overnight.

But we have to understand the magnitude of the problem today, understand what the magnitude of the problem will be 10 years from now, Mr. Speaker. And we have a responsibility to do that, a responsibility to act, and a responsibility to serve the people who elect us and serve the people of the province with both their interests in mind and to work with all the parties, Mr. Speaker. This isn't something that either, any political party has a franchise on, Mr. Speaker, or any group of citizens in our society have. But first and foremost, we have to have a desire to fix the problem. We have to want to fix the problem in order to start to fundamentally address those issues.

Mr. Speaker, we're seeing today those who are going to social assistance on the increase, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing a rise in those who have to depend upon the government for help and assistance, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, that's because the cost of living in our province has driven people, driven people, Mr. Speaker, to seeking assistance from their government. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's necessarily wrong, Mr. Speaker, but it's a trend we do not like to see. It's a trend we'd

prefer not to see, Mr. Speaker. We still definitely have a responsibility and an obligation to help those in our communities who need help.

But, Mr. Speaker, let's take a proactive approach. Let's all encourage all governments and all members of this legislature to take a proactive approach to create, for the citizens of our society and that new set of young adults coming up, opportunities to get into home ownership earlier. Let's not look at just rental accommodation, let's look at how we can help those that are in their 20s get to home ownership earlier. We can develop programs that help young people get into home ownership, Mr. Speaker. We can help people towards home ownership who have had to rent their entire lives through different programs, Mr. Speaker.

It's not a one-size-fits-all, but we can develop programs that help advance our society, using the money that the people of this province own. Because every single citizen, regardless of their status in life, in this province own our vast resources, Mr. Speaker, so we can use some of that resource revenue to ensure that our citizens get their value for their resource, Mr. Speaker. They own it. We do sell the right to mine it to individual companies, Mr. Speaker, but let's not forget that we, the citizens of our province, own that resource.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I look at this particular motion and I look at the situation facing us within this province, Mr. Speaker, I think it's obvious, although I haven't said it, this an urgent problem facing our province and that we need to examine very closely how we deal with the problem in the short term, Mr. Speaker. And today, today we need more emergency shelters than we have available to us. Too many, too many people today don't have a home to go to every night. So we need to look at what the short-term problem is, and we need to deal with that immediately, which means we need to provide more emergency shelters. We need to ensure that nobody has to live out in the cold, Mr. Speaker, or nobody has to be without some accommodation, Mr. Speaker. But that's a short-term problem, Mr. Speaker, a stopgap to dealing with the real problem, and that's to provide adequate, quality housing, Mr. Speaker, for our society, our communities, and for the people of the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see us do that in a number of ways. One would be providing the opportunity for young people to get back to a point where they can get into home ownership earlier. Mr. Speaker, the change in housing affordability has driven that back, I believe, 7 to 10 years. Well we can create an opportunity to move that time frame forward for the young, young adults in our province. And I think that's beneficial for all of us. That means they no longer then are renting accommodation, freeing up rental accommodation for others, Mr. Speaker.

You see how it works. As more of our families and young people get into home ownership, of course they don't need rental accommodation. The rental accommodation opens up for others. And, Mr. Speaker, as a result a number of the vacancy rate increases, Mr. Speaker, and people have more opportunity. The quality of life increases for people because they have opportunities for better housing opportunities, Mr. Speaker, and it has an affect on the entire housing situation in our province.

[12:45]

But, Mr. Speaker, that is never going to leave us without a situation where we have to build more affordable rental accommodation. We have an aging population, Mr. Speaker. As we have an aging population, we need to address the concerns of that aging population. We need to be able to provide assisted living, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at places that are uniquely designed for those who have mobility problems and have, Mr. Speaker, special needs.

And, Mr. Speaker, that will change again over time. But we have today an increasing seniors population in the province, and we will have for the next couple of decades at least, Mr. Speaker. And so the needs of the population of Saskatchewan is going to continue to change, but one very important and key need over the next several years, Mr. Speaker, is increased accommodation for our senior citizens.

And, Mr. Speaker, the one thing we can guarantee is we're all going to get there. We're all going to one day, all going to need seniors' accommodation at one point in our life. We're all going to age. I think there's few things you can guarantee in life and one is that we're all going to age and our needs are going to change, Mr. Speaker. And at some point we're going to need greater assistance than we have today.

Now, Mr. Speaker, so we're going to need to have accommodations for more senior citizens in our communities, Mr. Speaker. And one of the things we need to try to do is keep senior citizens closer to their families, closer to their home communities, Mr. Speaker, closer to their friends.

Mr. Speaker, it does very little or no good, very little or no good, Mr. Speaker, to senior citizens to have them have to move a significant distance away from their family, from their support mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, those things that we all need in order to ensure quality of life. Because, Mr. Speaker, it's every bit as important that our parents and our grandparents, and each of us as we get older, have those supports. We have our family close by as we need them, Mr. Speaker, that's common sense.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to have to continue to look at adopting our housing pattern for the demand, Mr. Speaker, in our communities and around the various areas of our province. Today there's very little opportunity in some communities, Mr. Speaker. But what's most sad today is many, many senior citizens — many of our parents, grandparents and those who built this great province that we live in — today are in hospital beds in hospitals because there are no opportunities for care for them in their home community, Mr. Speaker, or out in the community.

Well, Mr. Speaker, these are challenges that I think that we all acknowledge exist, and we all acknowledge need to be looked after. They need to be examined and we need to make progress on. But, Mr. Speaker, to date . . . And I hope next week in the budget, we will see some movement on a number of these issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, in three years, in three years, \$34 million for housing. In the last year of the last government, Mr. Speaker, in

2007, \$100 million in a single year. And the subsequent three years we've seen only \$34 million, Mr. Speaker. That's not the solution. That's not even the start of a solution, Mr. Speaker.

In 2007 we were looking at a scenario that required \$100 million for seven consecutive years. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker: \$100 million for seven consecutive years to put a plan in place to deal with the affordable housing needs of our province. Mr. Speaker, that was now just about four years ago. Today that would probably be double that because nothing has been done to keep pace with the changing environment and housing needs in our province.

Today housing or lists on waiting lists . . . Pardon me. People on waiting lists for housing in our communities are longer than they have ever been. In 2007 there were communities that had nobody on the list where there are literally thousands today. Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit about those lists. In January of 2008, there were 396 families on waiting lists and with an average wait time of 2.9 months to get into housing. In February of 2011, that had grown to 879, and the waiting time has increased to nearly five months, Mr. Speaker — 122 per cent increase in the number of people requiring housing, social housing. Mr. Speaker, in some communities you wait more than 12 months. The worst community in Saskatchewan today is the city of Swift Current, where the waiting list is 15 months. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker. The waiting list is 15 months for social housing.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's a single member of this Assembly that doesn't, when they hear that, have concern. And I would be willing to bet that most members in this Assembly didn't realize, didn't realize that in the city of Swift Current you'd wait 15 months on a waiting list to get into social housing. Mr. Speaker, in La Ronge the wait is nine months.

Mr. Speaker, for affordable housing in 2008, there were 205 families on waiting lists across the province. In February of 2011, three years later, it's doubled, Mr. Speaker, to 408, and moved from a 2.5 month wait on average to a 5.6 month wait. It's more than doubled — a 99 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker. And there are a number of communities for affordable housing that are above the 12 months, Mr. Speaker. And I'm not sure that many members of this Assembly understand that, know this information. Mr. Speaker, for affordable housing, the worst community in Saskatchewan is Estevan. And Estevan, you're on a waiting list for 19 months. In Estevan you're on a waiting list for 19 months to get affordable housing. Nineteen months, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in Swift Current it's 13 months; in Saskatoon it's 11 months.

Mr. Speaker, what are we doing about this? Obviously nothing, because the waiting times are increasing dramatically, dramatically, Mr. Speaker, and we've seen \$34 million put in. And they want more, the province. People are coming. They want more people to come and work. They want their province to continue to grow. Yet today, today the situation for families in many communities is unacceptable.

Seniors housing, Mr. Speaker, and this is something that I think that we need to pay attention to because as I've talked about over the last several . . . last hour or so, Mr. Speaker, about the fact that we have an aging population, more and more people

requiring assisted living, more and more people moving into seniors accommodation, Mr. Speaker.

In 2008 we had 521 people on a waiting list across the province, with an average wait time of three months before you can move into seniors housing. Today, Mr. Speaker, it's an average wait time of 6.2 months, 48 per cent increase, and, Mr. Speaker, there's a pattern forming here that I think should be considerably alarming to certain members of this Assembly.

The worst community for seniors housing in Saskatchewan is the city of Swift Current; you wait 15 months. And La Ronge is nine months. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I need to point out what's obvious. The Premier's home constituency is Swift Current. And you know what? Today if the Premier came in and announced, or if the Premier stood and announced today that we were going to spend considerable money in his constituency to deal with this housing problem, I'd support that. I would support it because it needs to be done and I don't care if it's in the Premier's constituency over others. Why would I care? Because it is a legitimate need that families in this province have, that citizens in this province have.

And, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier wanted to stand in his seat and announce today in the budget that he was spending considerable money to improve the housing situation in his community, I would applaud him for doing that. I wouldn't say it's self-serving that it's from his own community. I wouldn't. Because stat after stat shows his community needs it more than others. And because it needs it more than others, it should be done. It doesn't matter it's the Premier's constituency. It's not self-serving when you're addressing a real problem that needs to be fixed. It's dealing with the reality. His community, because it's faced growth and it's faced other challenges, has the worst housing situation in the province. And I would applaud the Premier if he stood on budget day and said he was going to fix it, he was going to address the problem.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that from January 2008, in all categories of housing that are closely monitored, we had 1,122 people on a waiting list in January 2008. By February 2011, it has grown to 1,984 — an increase of 77 per cent in just three years. We need to address this issue, or three years from now it's going to again have doubled or quadrupled, Mr. Speaker. And that is a sign that we have deserted the people of this province. We have let them down. We have failed to address their needs, Mr. Speaker. And we have put more children, more families, and more seniors in vulnerable situations, Mr. Speaker, because we have failed to make the proper public policy choices, Mr. Speaker, and we've failed to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, housing affordability, quality of life are things that the people of this province value for all its citizens. I can tell you today that the people in this province value the quality of life for all their citizens. We are a caring province. Our people care about their neighbours, they care about their friends, they care about their relatives. We care about one another. In no province in Canada is more money donated to charity, is more time given on behalf of charities or on behalf of others. In nowhere, nowhere in our country do people care more than in Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, to sum things up, I just simply want to say that we have a responsibility as the elected representatives of the people of this province to act in the interests of all our citizens to improve the quality of life, to deal with the issue of affordable housing, the quality of housing for all the people of our province. And we need to do it in several ways. We need to help get young adults into home ownership earlier. The affordability issue has driven many young adults out of the opportunity to build homes or to buy homes until much later in life because a home jumped from an average on a three-bedroom bungalow in Regina or Saskatoon from say \$250,000 to \$500,000, Mr. Speaker, for a new home. And that filters down through the entire housing market, Mr. Speaker. Having a negative impact on the end result is there are fewer rental properties available for others, Mr. Speaker, because people remain in rental properties longer.

So, Mr. Speaker, the quality of life, affordability, dignity, and respect, those are all things that we should all value and I believe we all do value. So collectively we need to work together, Mr. Speaker, we need to work together to solve the problem. And this government needs to know and understand that there is a problem. They have to be willing to address the problem in a comprehensive way on behalf of Saskatchewan people, on behalf of low-income people, Mr. Speaker, but most importantly on behalf of children because the decisions we make today affect future generations. We, the members of this Assembly, are people who have great opportunity, Mr. Speaker
...

The Speaker: — Order. It being now 1 p.m., the time of adjournment, this Assembly will adjourn until Monday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.]

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