



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

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 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Dwain Lingenfelter

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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 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Weyburn, the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the other members of the Assembly, I'm pleased to introduce five guests seated in your gallery. Today with us we have four students from the adult basic education class at the Southeast Regional College in Weyburn. The students' names are: Falon Adams, Melanie Boyle, Carly Du, and Laura Love.

As well they're accompanied by their teacher, Anna Fish, who, Mr. Speaker, I think each year since I've been a member, Ms. Fish has brought a group of students to the legislature and has once again today. And I look forward to meeting with them after question period. And I'd ask all members to welcome them to their Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly, I would like to introduce a fine group of 39 students and three teachers in the west gallery from my old school, the Yorkton Regional High School in Yorkton. With the students today, it's Mr. Ostapowich's grade 10 history class. I've had the pleasure of meeting with a lot of them previously at the school, and I welcome them here today.

It's always nice to see Mr. Ostapowich. You know, formerly he was working in Melville and he always brought students to the Assembly. And it's nice to see he carries on that tradition, bringing these Yorkton students to the Assembly. And I ask all members to welcome them along with Perry Ostapowich, the teacher, and Tom Schlamp and Janet Varga. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the west gallery is my son, Brent Michelson. Brent, just give us a wave. Brent is a graduate of the University of Regina with two degrees. He's part-time teaching now and just waiting on to get on to the full-time list, but he's taken some time out of the schedule to be with us today to watch the proceedings. So I'd ask everybody to welcome him. Thank you.

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

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you, through you, and to all members of the Assembly, a number of ladies who have travelled here from a faraway land

called Regina Beach. And we're very glad that they were able to join us in the Chamber today, and I hope that they enjoy the proceedings. Thank you very much.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions again on behalf of citizens who support maintaining quality health care services:

The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Saskatchewan humbly showeth that the Government of Saskatchewan ought to recognize the need for timely access to comprehensive and quality health care services for all communities within the province, including Wakaw and surrounding areas, and that the disruption of emergency services and in-patient services at Wakaw Hospital will not serve the residents in this community and surrounding areas; and

That the cuts in access to timely and accurate diagnostic and laboratory tests within the community of Wakaw and surrounding area will not serve the needs of the residents either.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to maintain quality health care services through the commitment of necessary funding to address critical retention and recruitment issues.

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

The signatures on these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, North Battleford, and Leader. I so present.

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 here 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 citizens living in poverty have long identified affordable solutions. Recent national and provincial initiatives, including the Saskatoon health disparities report and the Canada Without Poverty, Dignity for All campaign, call for a comprehensive poverty elimination strategy. 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.

I do so present. Thank you.

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 who live in Hampton Village who are expressing their concern about the need for an elementary school in the neighbourhood. The prayer reads, or 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 tax; 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 are residents of Hampton Village. I so present.

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

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition in support of a potash royalty review because the residents of Saskatchewan are the owners of a 1,000-year strategic resource and deserve to receive the maximum benefit from that resource. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, a recent announcement was that the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan has income in the last quarter of \$732 million and that this government has refused, absolutely refused to review the current potash royalty system. Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: cause the government to begin a comprehensive, transparent, and public review of Saskatchewan's potash royalty system with a view to maximizing the return from this strategic resource for its owners, the people of Saskatchewan, who wish to use these additional potash royalty revenues for needed investments in health care, child care, education, affordable housing, infrastructure, and other social programs as well as public initiatives such as debt repayment.

Mr. Speaker, today's petition is signed by good folks from Kamsack, Esterhazy, and Sturgis. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh

Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is again my pleasure to rise today and present a petition regarding restoring funding equity to Regina Catholic schools. In Regina, Regina Catholic schools receive \$275 less per pupil than Regina public schools for the last fiscal year, amounting to a funding inequity of \$2.7 million. That funding inequity places program delivery and staffing levels at risk, which we are now seeing programs being cut for the fall return of the children coming to school, Mr. Speaker.

The Government of Saskatchewan has denied Catholic school boards in the province representation on the government-appointed committee mandated to develop a long-term funding formula for Saskatchewan school boards. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to address the funding inequity between Regina Catholic schools and Regina public schools that provides \$275 less per pupil funding for Regina Catholic school students, totalling \$2.7 million, and make known that the continuation for another school year of funding inequity places program delivery and staffing levels at risk in Regina Catholic schools; and in so doing, immediately restore funding equity to ensure that every student in Saskatchewan, whether enrolled in a Catholic or public school, receives equitable resources to ensure every student in Saskatchewan has access to a quality education.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by the residents of Regina. I so present.

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise once again today to present a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the detrimental effect that Bill 160 would have on human rights law in the province, if enacted. 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 our province, are even considered.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the petitions are signed by residents of Regina, Rouleau, Regina Beach, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Borden. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, 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 billions of dollars of debt growth, consecutive years of debt growth under the Sask Party despite record highs in revenues, Mr. Speaker, this year alone increasing debt by \$548 million, Mr. Speaker. 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 La Ronge, Air Ronge, Estevan, and Regina. I so submit.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition in support of the government funding the 180 senior centres throughout this province that are currently struggling to remain open due to the rising costs of utilities, insurance, taxes, and other increasing costs. Mr. Speaker, the closure of these centres will lead to the deteriorating mental and physical health of seniors which unto itself is unacceptable, but it will also come at a price to our health care system by adding stress to our long-term health care beds and hospital beds. I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan cause the Government of Saskatchewan to provide the much-needed funding to assist seniors' recreation centres to remain open and active within their communities.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by folks in Edam, Kindersley, Rosetown, Dysart, and Craik. I so submit.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Paying Tribute to Seniors

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors contribute to society from a family, social, economic, and cultural standpoint. They contribute through work, volunteering, mentoring, and tutoring, allowing them to remain active and contribute to society. Many seniors live fulfilling, productive lives. They participate in activities that put to good use their abilities, their experience, and their knowledge for the benefit of each of us. These contributions give seniors a sense of worth and accomplishment.

Mr. Speaker, how we treat our seniors today is how each of us will be treated tomorrow. Such denial would be a foolhardy endeavour. Aging is a reality that we all face. Being indifferent to the contributions that seniors can continue to make to our

society is a loss. Being unconcerned about the poor conditions in which seniors live is an abdication of moral responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, we believe it is important that we seek to appreciate the needs, the hopes, and fears of seniors in our society and respond to them. Their sacrifices helped create the relative social and economic comfort we now enjoy. Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is proud to pay tribute to the significant ways in which seniors are continuing to shape our society with their experience and knowledge, and recognize all they have given to our families, our communities, and our workplaces.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in honouring those who have laid the solid foundation of our great province. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington.

The People are the Winners

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 41st federal election was described by some as the election nobody wanted. However, Mr. Speaker, last night's results show that this was the election Canada needed. Last night we saw a major shift in the electoral makeup of this country. Some parties were defeated while others are enjoying new-found support. The biggest winner is Canada's federal system, as national unity won the day. Unfortunately, not everyone can win in an election. Last night we saw two party leaders graciously accept their defeat. We also saw a changing of the guard of some party strongholds.

As we look to the Middle East and North Africa, Canadians should be forever grateful for being able to participate in an electoral system that chooses ballots over guns and bombs. Furthermore, I want to thank all the candidates, staffers, and volunteers who made sure that this campaign was a respectful one. All parties ensured that the tone was respectful, that election day was civil, and that the results were honoured. In Saskatchewan, we saw all parties present a strong campaign with some seats being tightly contested and the final results being a vote for stability.

Human civilization has come a long way to ensure the bloodless transfer of power. Mr. Speaker, Canadians truly enjoy the best system of government in the world, and the people of Canada are the ultimate winners.

[13:45]

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

Mental Health Week

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Mental Health Association is celebrating 60 years of improving people's understanding of mental health through their annual Mental Health Week, May 1st to 7th of this year.

Mental Health Week is an annual national event that takes place during the first week in May to encourage people from all walks

of life to learn, talk, reflect, and engage with others on all issues relating to mental health.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Mental Health Week theme is Mental Health For All. Mental Health Week 2011 will focus on key topics that will help the public have a broader understanding of mental health, including: kids have stress too, workplace mental health, resiliency, and mental health is everyone's concern.

Today we recognize that good mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. These new understandings of mental health are prompting a new kind of focus that identifies components of mental wellness and mental fitness, and explores ways to encourage them.

Mr. Speaker, one in five individuals will experience a mental health disorder during their lifetime. Mental illness is a pressing concern in every Saskatchewan community and we recognize the overwhelming effects mental illness has on individuals, families, and communities.

Mr. Speaker, we all need to increase our awareness of mental health issues. I hope we can all take the time to listen to or participate in information sessions during this special week. Thank you.

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

Saskatoon Entrepreneur Honoured

Mr. Wyant: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the 15th annual Chinese Canadian Entrepreneur Awards presented their top honour to Wally Mah of North Ridge Development Corporation of Saskatoon. Wally started his company in 1982 with business partner Julius Calyniuk. On April 2, Wally was named Entrepreneur of the Year by the Canadian association of Chinese entrepreneurs in Markham, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, Wally's company started out building a few houses a year and it steadily increased to more than 300 units in 2010, generating annual revenue in excess of \$80 million. Wally is dedicated to making sure his over 150 employees are kept informed of the company's growth and its commitment to giving back to the community by contributing to several local and significant charities. He also includes his employees in profit-sharing opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, it's exciting to note that 15 years have passed since ACCE [Association of Chinese Canadian Entrepreneurs] founded these prestigious awards to recognize both individuals and companies for their excellence in entrepreneurship in the Chinese Canadian business community. Wally reflects this excellence as he works tirelessly and makes an effort to visit each one of his work sites. He also values the input of his employees who have a great stake in the community with his profit-sharing program. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this House, I'd like to congratulate Wally Mah for this award and his hard work over the years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, this week marks North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. This week provides an opportunity to not only heighten awareness for employers and employees but for all of us, the importance of safety on the job. Mr. Speaker, in 2009 the Workers' Compensation Board reported that 34 people were killed in the workplace. Since then, workplace deaths have increased by 11 to 45 in 2010. Mr. Speaker, this is simply too many deaths, and unacceptable. In addition, there were 38,773 injuries reported in 2010. And these are only the reported injuries, not including, for example, our very important farming sector.

Saskatchewan workers are tenacious and hard-working. Workplace deaths have increased, and it's up to all of us to take some immediate action to prevent these tragedies. Mr. Speaker, with 45 Saskatchewan workers dead in a year, clearly government must play a role in regulating occupational health and safety standards. We must be progressive and not regressive.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members in joining me in marking North American Occupational Safety and Health Week and call on the Sask Party government to confirm the commitment to creating a culture of workplace safety so that no one is killed or injured on the job. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Moose Jaw Business Excellence Awards

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there was a celebration of Moose Jaw business excellence as the Moose Jaw and District Chamber of Commerce hosted the 10th annual Business Excellence Awards recently. This prestigious event attracts members, associates, family, and friends who came out to cheer for 30 nominated community businesses being recognized for their quality and distinction in 11 different categories.

The event recognized several established businesses like W.J. Jones & Son Funeral Home for community involvement, Providence Place for business innovation, Parrish & Heimbecker for job creation, and Conexus for the Pioneer Award.

There were also many newer businesses and business ventures, including Radiant Skin, selected as Young Entrepreneur; Crescent Park Chiropractic Centre for healthy workplace; the New Board Shop for customer service; and Double Shift Conditioning as New Business Venture.

The Moose Jaw Warriors were selected as the marketing, in the marketing category and also as the Business of the Year. Congratulations to Harry Watson of Triple 4 Advertising for being named Business Leader of the Year.

It was a gala event of achievement, success, and celebration, and a reflection of the entrepreneurial attitude throughout Saskatchewan. I ask this Assembly to join me in congratulating all the nominees and winners of the Moose Jaw Business

Excellence Awards. Thank you.

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

North Battleford Sarcen Receives Awards

Mr. Taylor: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the management and staff at the North Battleford Sarcen location who have recently been informed that they have won the SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] Customer Service and Cleanliness Awards for 2011 in the extra-large depot competitions. This means that the North Battleford location was in the same size category as, for example, Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert locations.

The North Battleford Sarcen depot last year handled more than 11 million containers. It has 13 staff members and is supervised by Jim Ramsay. It operates under the authority of The Battlefords Trade and Education Centre and has been open since 1988 and in its present building since 2003.

At least one of the current employees has been with Sarcen for more than 20 years; others have been there as many as 10 and 15 years. According to Supervisor Ramsay, the staff are “very hard-working and enthusiastic, and try hard to please their customers.”

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me today in congratulating the good folks at the North Battleford Sarcen depot who today can say, we are number one in Saskatchewan when it comes to customer service and cleanliness.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Services for Seniors

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of older adults live independently and want to continue to do so. Healthy living can delay and minimize the severity of chronic diseases and disabilities in later life, thus saving health care costs and reducing the need for long-term care. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan needs a broad provincial strategy that focuses on positive aging and promotes age-friendly policy initiatives. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will he commit today to adopting this important type of seniors provincial strategy?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to say on the outset to those seniors that are here plus seniors across the province, on behalf of our government, we want to thank them for all the great work that they've done within this province over decades, Mr. Speaker, to bring the province to where it is today that we can enjoy the luxuries that we have in this province, Mr. Speaker. Most of that or all of that can be attributable to many of the seniors that are here today as well as those across the province that aren't here.

As far as the delivery of health care, Mr. Speaker, and the

delivery of health care specifically to seniors, we're always looking at how we can improve our health care system to ensure that, be it seniors or youth, all people within the province receive the best possible care that this government can deliver, Mr. Speaker. I think we're well on the way of doing that, but there's always room for improvement, Mr. Speaker.

I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of seniors' groups, and certainly there are specific issues that they're lobbying for and asking for, Mr. Speaker. But when we look at the overall services delivered and some of those that are specific for seniors, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a pretty good program here in the province, one that can be improved on, Mr. Speaker, that we have been improving on each and every year, Mr. Speaker. But we're pretty proud of the record that we've put in place in the first three and a half years of our government.

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

Ms. Junor: — It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. There's hardly a mention of the word seniors on the government website, so that's the type of attention they are paying to seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan continues to rank first in the country with respect to the percentage of population aged 65 or over at 15.4 per cent, well above the Canadian average of 13.7. And it's predicted that the percentage of seniors aged 65 and older in Saskatchewan will rise to 25 per cent in just a few years.

Mr. Speaker, a single point of entry to government services for seniors would provide the necessary attention and funding needed to support seniors. It would also provide a coordinated and comprehensive framework of legislation, policy, and programs that would see the government able to address the needs of this growing population. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will he commit today to establishing a seniors' secretariat?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, certainly we are, as I said, looking at the programs that we deliver to seniors throughout the province, and we want to ensure that they know the programs that are available through health regions. The health regions deliver those programs, Mr. Speaker, but as I said from the outset in my first answer, we're always looking to improve services for seniors.

A single-point access is an idea that has been thrown around before. It's one that we're not opposed to, Mr. Speaker. We haven't implemented it as yet, Mr. Speaker, but we're not opposed to it. We'll certainly look at that as we move forward and look at the pros and cons of such a model, Mr. Speaker. There are some provinces that do have that right now; there are many that don't. I do know that this province has never had one under previous governments or under this government. It is certainly something that we can look at into the future.

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

Ms. Junor: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has a very short

memory. Mr. Speaker, low-income seniors are in need of help. There's a gap in subsidized services for low-income seniors with high care needs. Mr. Speaker, sometimes that maximum allowable home care does not meet seniors' needs. Seniors who can afford it can supplement home care with private services. However seniors who need to top up home care to remain in their homes or who need to go into a personal care home cannot afford either option.

Mr. Speaker, seniors who cannot afford services necessary for their health and safety should not be forced to live at risk. Can the minister commit today to providing a financial supplement for low-income seniors to access home care at our personal care homes?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, there are many different levels of care delivery for seniors or mainly for seniors, Mr. Speaker — be it home care, be it long-term care, be it special care homes, Mr. Speaker — and it's a continuum of care that we strive to make sure is in place, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about home care and particularly in the last three and a half years of our government, Mr. Speaker, I know we have, when you look at it compared to other provinces, we haven't been as high as other provinces. But in the last three and a half years under this government, home care alone has increased by 34 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're putting more into home care than has ever been put into home care before. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when we became government, there was about \$110 million spent on home care. Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget it's \$148 million. We're moving on that issue, Mr. Speaker. More work to do certainly, but we've come a long ways from where we were just three and a half years ago.

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

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, not only do seniors want to stay in their own homes, they want to stay in their own communities. But, Mr. Speaker, it's becoming more and more difficult to do so with access to health services disappearing weekly from rural communities. Hospital closures in Wakaw, in Kamsack, in Big River, in Spiritwood, in Leader, in Redvers now, in Shellbrook; reduced ambulance and laboratory services in Coronach, in Cudworth, in Neilburg; as well as closures of long-term care beds in Wawota and Canora and Esterhazy and Muskeg Lake makes it nearly impossible for seniors to remain in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, when will the minister stop closing hospitals and long-term care beds and cutting services and pay attention to the needs of rural seniors?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, we've worked diligently in the last three and a half years to ensure we have the proper complement of health care providers, be it nurses, be it physicians. We've increased the number of physicians in this province. We've increased the number of nurses. We've increased a number of different areas, health care professionals

in the province, Mr. Speaker. And in communities that are struggling to recruit doctors, we will continue to recruit into those areas, Mr. Speaker.

But she stood on her feet, and she named a number of facilities. And I was trying to add them up as she named them, but I know it didn't add up to 52 hospital closures under the NDP [New Democratic Party], Mr. Speaker. That's what the NDP did. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you want to look about long-term care facilities in this province, in 16 years of NDP government, they closed 1,200 long-term care beds in Saskatchewan. That's the record of the opposition, Mr. Speaker. We don't ever want to go back to those days.

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

Changes to Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, pensions are a major issue for the people of Saskatchewan. About 52 per cent of Saskatchewan workers don't have a workplace pension, and that's a concern since in the next 25 years the number of Saskatchewan people 65 and older is expected to climb by 78 per cent. To improve the situations, groups such as the Canadian Labour Congress have pushed the provinces to expand the Canada Pension Plan, which will benefit all workers after they retire.

The previous Finance minister indicated, as did other provinces, that he was on board with expanding the existing Canada Pension Plan. But now there's a new Finance minister, and it's not so clear. Will the Finance minister promise to put the future of Saskatchewan people first and commit to supporting changes to the Canada Pension Plan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

[14:00]

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I can report to the member opposite and to all the people in the province of Saskatchewan that at our most recent Finance ministers' meeting back in December of 2010, we had three topics that were being discussed. The first one was the framework for pooled registered pension plans, the PRPPs, which we know in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we lead the nation because we're the only province, Mr. Speaker, that has the Saskatchewan Pension Plan.

One of the other topics was financial literacy to make sure that people understand the need to start building for retirement. And, Mr. Speaker, the third one, it was a modest enhancement to the Canada Pension Plan. The Canada Pension Plan is a very important plan to many, and we have to look at the options that are going to be before us. And, Mr. Speaker, with the federal election out of the road as of yesterday, the next meeting of Finance ministers is to take place in June, at which point we're going to probably have a number of options under considerations for what might be done to improve the Canada Pension Plan.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon

Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, while several provincial Finance ministers had indicated interest in making these changes to bolster the CPP [Canada Pension Plan], Ottawa chose to step in with the new plan of supersized group RRSPs [registered retirement savings plan]. These group RRSPs are more expensive, mean lower benefits for workers, and are also much riskier. Douglas Peters, a Toronto Dominion Bank economist and former secretary of state of international financial institutions in the Chrétien cabinet said, and I quote, “Increased RRSP contributions will make the financial institutions better off while an increase in the CPP contributions will make Canadian pensioners better off.”

Since bolstering the CPP will help Saskatchewan people and supporting Ottawa’s scheme will help bankers, will the minister now commit to supporting Saskatchewan people and improving the Canada Pension Plan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of valid concerns raised by everyone in terms of whether or not we should enhance the Canada Pension Plan and look at the effects of not only the contributions that an employee would have to put in but also the employer.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the other concerns of course is the Saskatchewan Pension Plan. And that’s why, Mr. Speaker, back, as the member indicated, the former Finance minister initiated discussion with Ottawa to ensure that we could change the plan.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Pension Plan has been in operation for over two decades. It had a limit of \$600. It’s a voluntary plan. It’s a voluntary contribution plan, Mr. Speaker, and what we wanted to do was to enhance that, Mr. Speaker. So the federal government has granted that enhancement, and in fact it was changed to \$2,500 just at the end of 2010. And, Mr. Speaker, there have been numerous individuals that have taken advantage. And, Mr. Speaker, if there is a subsequent question, I’ll give the information to the member opposite.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just an answer, Mr. Speaker, would be enough. The idea of expanding the Canada Pension Plan does not just have the support of economists, the Canadian people want this as well. A recent Environics poll showed that 76 per cent of Canadians support increasing CPP benefits.

Without changes to improve the pension plan now, many Canadians could find themselves spending their retirement not in freedom 55, not in a freedom 55 ad, Mr. Speaker, but in abject poverty. Obviously the government does not want to see even more seniors in poverty than that amount already there. So will the minister start working with his fellow finance ministers on expanding the pension plan, putting in the necessary money, and tell the Prime Minister we don’t want his RRSP scheme?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I think I made it pretty clear that as a province we want to work with our fellow finance ministers representing all of the provinces and the territories to build a retirement . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do want to build a strong Canada Pension Plan as well as we’re going to look at the pooled registered pension plans. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows, I’m sure, that to make any changes to the Canada Pension Plan you require two-thirds of the majority of provinces, representing two-thirds of the . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I’d ask the member who asked the . . . Order. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, it’s interesting how I have the fingers shook at me, Mr. Speaker, over from the benches opposite. The members opposite want me to indicate whether or not we’re prepared to work with other provinces to build a retirement plan that includes . . . Mr. Speaker, the Canada Pension Plan will change if two-thirds of the provinces, representing two . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. The member from Saskatoon Fairview has asked a question. I would ask the member to now allow the Minister of Finance to respond to the question. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Two-thirds of the provinces, representing two-thirds of the population of the Dominion of Canada — if there is agreement by that group, then the changes that are projected will be in fact come into force, Mr. Speaker. We’re going to have options put on the table, Mr. Speaker, at our meeting in June, Mr. Speaker. That meeting will address all of the work that has been done since our meeting in December. There will be, I’m sure, many options, everything from increasing the maximum earnings, Mr. Speaker. There’s a whole host of options that we’re going to consider, and we’re going to look at what’s best for the people of Saskatchewan.

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

Cost of Living for Seniors

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ability for Saskatchewan seniors to afford the increases in the daily costs of living have been reduced severely. Increases in housing costs, utilities, food, and pharmaceuticals have put extreme pressures on seniors who live on fixed incomes. To the minister: where are the government plans to help these seniors meet their daily expenses?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And to the members opposite, and to the seniors that are with us today and the ones that are listening, we all know that the Saskatchewan advantage is because of the work that they've been doing. And we as government recognize that when we became government, and with some of the first work we did was increasing the seniors' income benefits that hadn't been touched since 1992. We more than doubled the amount of money that seniors on seniors' income plan were getting, and we doubled the number of people who were getting those benefits as well, Mr. Speaker. That's part of the work that we've been doing.

We've also allowed 17,000 seniors to have more money for things like eye exams and chiropractor services and reducing prescription drug plans. Mr. Speaker, we know that the seniors are not only an important part of building of our province, but they're an important part of growing our province into the future. And this is the work that we started, we'll be continuing under this government.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're pretty proud of our record for seniors, particularly the seniors' health plan that helped 115,000 seniors. And she brings up the Saskatchewan Income Plan, which is ironic that she does that because over the last two years they have cut \$4 million from that program — 4 million. And she laughs; she thinks that's funny. Sixteen hundred seniors have been cut from that program, and there will be more this summer. This is not a laughing matter because they've made an awful lot out of it, and \$4 million off the budget is a shameful, shameful record.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: too many seniors are having to choose between food and medication, electricity or rent. When will this government take the concerns of seniors seriously and help them in a meaningful way to make ends meet?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should know the answer to this question, but I'm going to remind him. The reason why there's more people that are not on the seniors' income plan is they don't qualify any more. Do you know why? Because seniors in many cases have more money. The reason why they don't, there is fewer people there is because they're not qualifying. They have money in their pockets.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite should realize that they did not . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I would expect that the members asking the question would like to allow the members who have joined us to hear the answer. I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about the NDP record with seniors, let's talk about the fact that the number of seniors living in poverty under the NDP tripled in their last 10 years of government. The number of seniors living in poverty under the NDP went from 7,000 to 23,000 people in 10 years. And you know what they did for the seniors of the province? They sent them a pin to tell them they were a senior.

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister responsible for Saskatoon Centre.

Support for Seniors' Housing

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we could talk about food banks, but I want to talk housing. Housing was one issue that puts particular pressure on our seniors. In Lloydminster the wait time for affordable housing for seniors is six months. In Saskatoon it's nine months; 11 months in North Battleford; and 17 months in Melville. This is from their own answers to written questions. Literally hundreds of seniors are struggling to meet the simple cost of keeping a roof over their heads.

To the minister: out of the housing plans that were announced over the past two years, how many new units for Sask Housing will be built for seniors in the next year?

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

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the five-point plan for housing that we announced not too long ago in the House actually had \$36 million that could work towards some of the senior housing. We have 436 new units for seniors that are under construction at this time right now, under construction or completed. We have single, low-income seniors in our province who have \$1,200 per year more now in their pocket right now they can use for issues like housing. Mr. Speaker, we have spent \$40 million as a government since November of 2007 for housing specifically identified for seniors. Mr. Speaker, there is more work to be done, and I assure you that the work we're doing in housing really does include the seniors in our province.

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

Transition and Emergency Housing

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that answer ironic as well because when we ask questions and bring questions, she just refused to answer them. And that was on March 30th.

But I do have a different kind of question I want to ask. Many of our seniors find themselves victimized, and while many jurisdictions have provided safe environments for seniors who are leaving abusive situations, Saskatchewan's taken a back seat with no shelters for senior women, no emergency housing for people who are in need of additional care for health reasons, and no shelters whatsoever for senior men. To the minister: what steps has this government taken to ensure that Saskatchewan seniors who want to leave a situation where they are abused can do so without having to live on the street?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, no one wants to see anybody victimized — whether it's a single person, whether it's a single woman, whether it's a child, whether it's anybody else — no one wants to see somebody that's a victim of not having adequate shelter. No one wants to . . . [inaudible] . . . victim of, being a victim of a crime or inadequate food or poverty or anything else, Mr. Speaker.

Through the various ministries we will ensure that there is adequate housing and that there are adequate programs in place to ensure that people that need transition housing, whether it be a single woman, whether it be a person that's in need. Through the Ministry of Social Services and Ministry of Justice we will ensure, Mr. Speaker, that those people do not fall through the cracks, that they have an adequate and appropriate plan put in place for them. And we'll work through a variety of different agencies to ensure that that takes place, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Seniors' Centres

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 180 seniors' centres across the province, most of them in rural Saskatchewan, with a total membership of almost 8,000. The cost of keeping these centres open is escalating. Utility rates are increasing, not to mention that many of the facilities are older and in need of repairs, such as new furnaces, windows, or shingles.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Seniors Association has in good faith continually met with the minister hoping he would see the benefits of providing core funding to these centres so they can remain open. To the minister: will he commit today to providing the much-needed funding to seniors' centres across the province so they can remain open?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly know the issue around the senior centres across the province. And some are very, very active and supply great services. Some are struggling because of membership. I've met with the association on this issue a couple of times, Mr. Speaker. And I guess, you know, when you look at what we are responsible for through the Ministry of Health and the delivery of programs, Mr. Speaker, we put in \$4.46 billion — the highest budget ever put towards health care in this province, Mr. Speaker.

We didn't feel it was a responsibility of Health to then move on helping senior centres with their power bills and their energy bills, Mr. Speaker. We didn't look at that as a core value that we need to work towards through the Ministry of Health, Mr. Speaker. I will say though that many of these facilities need to continue to look at their budgets and how they can make their operations viable within their membership that they have.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, healthy, vibrant seniors — it is a health issue. The Sask Party's answer to keeping senior centres open is to have seniors do more work. They are told they should put on more fundraisers, do more bake sales, hold more raffles, or increase membership fees. Mr. Speaker, these are 80- and 90-year-old people, many of whom are on fixed incomes. They can't do more work, and many of them can't afford a higher membership fee.

The minister is so out of touch with this issue that in January when the Saskatchewan Seniors Association met with him once again to ask for core funding for senior centres, he clearly hadn't read the brief he'd been given because he thought they were asking for \$1 million when they were asking for \$360,000. To the minister: when he realized he was being asked for \$360,000, he laughed and said he had never been asked for such a low amount of money. If it is such a small amount of money, is he going to give it to seniors to keep their centres open?

[14:15]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we thank the member for her question. Mr. Speaker, this government places a high priority on physical and social activity for the province's valued senior citizens. A broad range of opportunities for seniors already exists in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and our Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport has the honour of supporting many of them.

For example, through gaming proceeds allocated to the community vitality fund, Saskatchewan communities can access funding to improve facilities used by their seniors for recreation and social activities. In fact our government has just approved community vitality program funding for well over 100 projects all across Saskatchewan, and we have already begun work on making arrangements for a second intake of project applications. This government is very proud to help with the work of seniors to stay active, Mr. Speaker. We know how important it really is.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, senior centres are used for health education, workshops, foot care, blood pressure, and diabetes clinics. Most importantly they provide a place for seniors to go for companionship and fellowship. They contribute to keeping seniors healthier and more active and save the government money because they contribute to lessening the need for long-term care beds and hospital beds. The minister is being asked for \$360,000 to cover 8,000 senior recreation centre members. In a year, it works out to 12 cents per member per day — 12 cents. To the minister: does he value Saskatchewan seniors enough to provide 12 cents per day per member to keep the 180 seniors' recreation centres open and to keep seniors healthy and active?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this government places as a key priority physical and social activity for the province's senior citizens. I already mentioned gaming proceeds going to the community vitality program. I'll never get through the whole list, Mr. Speaker. As I said, well in excess of 100 projects have already been approved. A whole new group of applications is now being reviewed. I'll just keep going until you give me the windup signal, Mr. Speaker.

The Albertown Hall in Hafford will be improved. Balcarres arena plant room will be improved. There's going to be a new furnace with air conditioning in Benson. There's going to be a new on-ice furnace in the same facility. Replacement of furnace and water heater in Birch Hills. Reconstruction of the playground equipment in Stockholm. Installation of low-E [low-emissivity] foil ceiling and energy efficient lighting in the skating rink in Blaine Lake. I had the pleasure of going, Mr. Speaker. Community kitchen and cultural cooking programs in Melfort will be improved.

The Speaker: — Members time has elapsed. Order. Order.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Kirsch: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on Crowns and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 149, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2010* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill, and that the Bill be now read the third time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has requested leave to waive consideration in the Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 149, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2010* without amendment, that the Bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 149 — *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2010*

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has moved that Bill No. 149, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2010* without amendment be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Kirsch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee of Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 150, the superannuation amendment Act, 2010 without amendments.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill and that the Bill be now read the third time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 150, *The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2010* without amendment and that the Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to third reading.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 150 — *The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2010*

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has moved that Bill No. 150, *The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2010* without amendment be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING
AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Kirsch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 170, *The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2011* without amendments.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill and that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 170, *The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2011* without amendment and that the Bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may move to third reading.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 170 — *The Corporation Capital Tax
Amendment Act, 2011***

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 170, *The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2011* without amendment be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING
AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Kirsch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report Bill No. 171, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2011* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill and that the Bill be now read the third time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 171, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2011 (No. 2)* without amendment and that the Bill be now read the third time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The minister may proceed to third reading.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 171 — *The Income Tax
Amendment Act, 2011 (No. 2)***

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has moved that Bill No. 171, *The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2011 (No. 2)* without amendment be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING
AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of Crown and Central Agencies.

Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies

Mr. Kirsch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies to report that it has

considered certain estimates and to present its 12th report. I move:

That the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Chair of Crown and Central Agencies:

That the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies be now concurred in.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, yesterday I made a commitment to come back to the House regarding a point of order by the Opposition House Leader. On Monday, May 2nd, 2011, the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order regarding the ministerial statement made by the Minister of Energy and Resources. He did so very shortly after the minister began speaking. The Opposition House Leader indicated that the ministerial statement contained previously announced information dated March 7th and did not contain a new idea, program, or public policy, but rather something that had been in the newspaper for more than two months.

The Deputy Government House Leader responded to the point of order by stating that the minister had no opportunity to provide information on the new announcement before the intervention. It became apparent that the Opposition House Leader based his point of order on the basis of the minister having provided an advance copy of the announcement to the opposition critic.

In accordance with previous rulings of the Speaker, I advised the Assembly that the minister did not have the opportunity to make his ministerial statement as it is difficult to determine the appropriateness of a ministerial statement as it is being delivered. I committed to review the details of the specifics of the ministerial statement. I have done this and I'm now prepared to rule on the matter.

The ministerial statement made by the Minister of Energy and Resources can be found beginning on page 7427 of *Hansard*. The minister outlined that the company, Paper Excellence, had been accelerating the restart program of the pulp mill in Prince Albert — new funding to train new mill workers, new pension plan agreements, and a new timeline for major forest activity.

The Opposition House Leader is correct that the Prince Albert pulp mill reopening was previously announced in a news release and a ministerial statement on March 7, 2011. Reviewing the record, I find that the ministerial statement appears to announce new initiatives that Paper Excellence itself had undertaken. The Speaker could not determine what, if

anything, in the statement might be a new government program or initiative. In future I would ask that ministerial statements clearly articulate new government initiatives, direction, policy, and . . . Order. Order. Order. Order. Policy and programs.

This case once again highlights the confusion that exists over what constitutes a proper ministerial statement. This latest example highlights the need for members to clarify and define the proper content for ministerial statements through the Standing Committee on House Services.

Order. Order. Order. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — To ask leave to move a motion under rule 59.

The Speaker: — I would ask the member from Saskatoon Fairview to state the reasons for his . . . and read the motion under rule 59.

MOTION UNDER RULE 59

Expansion of Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, since most Saskatchewan people have no workplace pension, many seniors live in poverty, and especially because of the fact we have a new majority federal government about to take office, we must deal with this situation. We need to immediately start working with other provinces to push for the expansion of the Canada Pension Plan, not on the Conservative government's RRSP plan.

Therefore my motion reads as follows:

That this Assembly acknowledge that about 52 per cent of all workers in Saskatchewan do not have a workplace pension plan, and that between 2010 and 2036, the number of people 65 years and older will increase by 78 per cent in Saskatchewan to 272,000;

It also acknowledges providing a secure future for retirement is important for all Saskatchewan workers;

It therefore endorses the gradually and fully funded expansion of the Canada Pension Plan a majority of the provinces agreed to at the federal-provincial Finance ministers meeting in June 2010 in Crowbush, Prince Edward Island;

It also urges the Government of Saskatchewan to work towards consensus on the expansion of the CPP in the upcoming meeting of the provincial Finance ministers.

I so move.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — No.

The Speaker: — Leave has not been granted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the answer to question 1,048.

The Speaker: — 1,048 has been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — Committee of Finance. I do now leave the Chair.

[14:30]

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE**General Revenue Fund****Executive Council****Vote 10****Subvote (EX01)**

The Chair: — Welcome to Committee of the Whole. The first item of business is the estimates for Executive Council, vote 10, found on page 65 of the Saskatchewan Estimate book.

Before we begin, I would like to advise the Committee of Finance of the process. First I will invite the Premier to introduce his officials, followed by calling the estimate, then the Premier can make his opening remarks. Will the Premier now introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — I'm honoured to do that, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for the opportunity. And as I understand it, as you've just highlighted, we'll have a chance for some introductory remarks after you've officially called for the estimates.

So to make room for that, it's an honour to be able to introduce my deputy minister, the deputy minister to Executive Council, Doug Moen; to my right is Reg Downs, senior adviser to Executive Council. To Doug's left is Dylan Jones, the associate deputy minister of intergovernmental affairs, which is a file that I have responsibility for within the government organization, Mr. Chair. And just behind Dylan is Bonita Cairns who's the executive director of corporate services in Executive Council. Also joining me, immediately behind me, James Saunders, associate deputy minister, cabinet planning, and beside him Graham Stewart from House business, research coordinator in Executive Council. I thank the officials in advance for the services they'll provide to committee today.

The Chair: — Executive Council, vote no. 10, subvote (EX01), central management and services. The Premier may now proceed with his opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll keep these brief. At least I'll endeavour to keep them brief so that we have a time for the debate and the discussion and the questions that the Leader of the Opposition and other opposition members may wish to put forward to myself.

Mr. Chair, I will say this though by way of introduction. These are very interesting times in the province of Saskatchewan, not only because of the current economic state of Saskatchewan, a state that is one of leadership within the country; not only because of the relative fiscal health of the province of Saskatchewan, again a jurisdiction that is leading North America, I would argue, in terms of its fiscal health currently, Mr. Speaker; not only because of the prospects we have for the future for Saskatchewan. In a world that is desirous of both energy security and food security, here we are in the province of Saskatchewan with answers to both of those questions in prolific proportions.

And so, Mr. Chair, there's significant opportunity for the province to move forward economically, to continue its leadership position, and then to make the right decisions as to the dividends of that leadership. Mr. Chair, we believe that the dividends of this growth — the dividends of the resource income we have, of the economic prosperity of the province — must be reinvested in today to make sure that we're making quality of life improvements every day, that we're improving health care where we can, that we have social services as they're needed, that we're investing in education, that we're keeping taxes low, that we pay off the general debt of the province so that we can find that virtuous circle where the province continues to grow because of that quality of life and fiscal health. That's the first source for the dividends of growth and resource wealth that we would argue need to be deployed.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, and I hope we have the debate here today about the long-term future of this province. I know that there is some commonality in terms of the Opposition Leader and myself in the government side in terms of wanting to ensure that the resource wealth of the province has long-term dividends for future generations. I think we'll probably hear perhaps the discussion today of the opposition idea of a sovereign wealth fund, the likes of which exists in Norway and other places around the world that really does pave the way for future generations in those jurisdictions. I think in principle we'll find some agreement there, though we would argue we need to pay off the general debt of the province first before we get there.

But notionally we believe the second deployment of the dividends of growth today must be in the economy tomorrow. It must be in the innovation agenda. It must be in the education of our children. It must be in the closing of the gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals in the province. These are the long-term initiatives of the government that I'm sure will be a source of debate and discussion. I hope they are. There's different ways to get there, different royalty policies perhaps, different taxation policies. We have set our course, and the opposition have their own.

And so for these reasons, this discussion today will be important because, Mr. Chair, of course in just a matter of months this will be a season of choosing in the province, where people will have to make a decision about all of these issues

and vest their trust in a political party to form the government post November the 7th of this year. I think this debate that we're about to have will very much be a preview of the coming debate in the months ahead and of the general election as we seek to answer these questions about what do we do with the opportunities that exist, both to improve life today and to ensure life is improved going forward for future generations.

And then finally, Mr. Chair, this is an important time for us because yesterday the people of Canada chose a new national government. And it's quite evident now that we're going to have four years of election-free government at the national level. And it's important now for this province to continue to assert its leadership position within Canada as the country has discussions about long-term funding for health care nationwide, maybe a discussion down the road about equalization. We don't know if that might be coming. Fiscal federalism might be discussed in these next four years with this government.

For all of these reasons, for the opportunities of today, for what we can build tomorrow in this province, for Saskatchewan's position in Canada with a new federal government, for Saskatchewan's opportunities in the world, this day and this debate is important. And we look forward to answering the questions that come forward from members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition. And we thank you for the opportunity to make introductory remarks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier, for your opening comments. And I want to thank the staff too of the Premier who are here today to help with the estimates. And just want to say, before we start, that I'm not quite sure how many of my members will want to ask questions, but I appreciate the Premier offering up that he will answer questions not only from myself but from other members of the opposition as well, Mr. Chairman. So I just wanted to say thank you for that.

I want to start my comments, and not totally on topic of the estimates, but to say congratulations to the Prime Minister and the victory yesterday. I think anyone who has been watching the advancement and the role of Prime Minister Harper over the last number of years, last night saw the culmination of some pretty interesting and good strategy planning on the part of the Prime Minister.

And I think, while there is a worry in the country about giving a mandate, a strong mandate to the Prime Minister, there's obviously positive things about having a stable government in Canada too. And whether that's Liberal or Conservative or New Democrat in the future, obviously in the British parliamentary system while the minority government system does work, and we shouldn't fear that, obviously a majority government in my mind works even better. So I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and the party, the Conservative Party on winning that majority.

On the worrying side, many people are sincere when they say they worry about lack of pension initiatives that might come as a result of that, or changes to the Canadian Wheat Board that

might be detrimental to farmers. And we'll be asking a few questions of the Premier about that. But fair to say that within the system of parliamentary democracy the people are always right, and that's certainly true last night.

I want to also congratulate the Leader of the Liberal Party, not on his victory but on his work as Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Ignatieff, obviously a proud Canadian who worked very hard for the last couple of years. And all of us know what that's like. We don't always win. Sometimes you have to take a hit and obviously last night the Liberal Party and the leader, Mr. Ignatieff, took a fairly big hit.

But for those who predict the end of the Liberal Party of Canada, I'm obviously not one of them, because they too are a very strong institution in this country. And with a solid base of seats — obviously not as many as they had planned on — but spread throughout the country, obviously the Liberal Party is a brand name and will be working hard to earn the respect of Canadians and do better in the election four years from now.

Obviously Elizabeth May, the Leader of the Green Party, created history with her victory yesterday. And I must say her victory against a sitting cabinet minister is very impressive and not a small win, but I thought a very large vote; will add an interesting aspect to Canadian politics. And so I wanted to congratulate her as well.

And of course to the Bloc — and I'm sure the Premier agrees with me on this — none of us are sad to see the separatist party in Canada reduced greatly. And I'm sure this is another thing we can agree on, is that having a separatist party sitting in the Parliament of Canada for those of us in Western Canada is a bit, seems a bit confusing that how do you have people sitting in the House of Commons — but again the public in Quebec has every right to elect who they want — but from my point of view, and I'm sure the Premier would agree with me, that having fewer separatists in the House of Commons is good for Canada.

And I want to end my comments about the election by congratulating my good friend and colleague, Jack Layton, on doing what leaders of the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation] and NDP have been trying to do for many, many decades. In my long history in politics, I can remember many federal elections where we dreamed about winning seats in Quebec, and winning even 10 seats in Quebec was a dream that we shared within the party.

And last night, while torn by the fact that we didn't win seats in Saskatchewan, but watching the results come in and getting over 100 seats for the New Democratic Party and forming for the first time the official opposition in Canada, it was a night that New Democrats have celebrated for the last 20 hours. And I just want to say that I wanted to extend to Jack Layton and his team a very, very special congratulations on doing just a tremendous job.

[14:45]

And also not only to winning 100 seats but record numbers of percentage of women that he had running for the New Democratic Party is something that we're working hard on in

our caucus as well, but not doing as well as Mr. Layton. But I'd just say that I think all of us have to do a much better job of trying to get that gender balance to 50/50 to be successful. And my information is that the New Democratic Party federally had 40 per cent women and that the election of a large number of women to the House of Commons will bode very well for, not only for the New Democratic Party, but for Canada as well. So I just wanted to say a very big congratulations to the New Democratic Party and to Jack Layton and his team.

And also I find it interesting that Saskatchewan, with about 33 per cent of the vote for the NDP Party, was second highest in Canada. Only Quebec had a higher percentage of New Democrats voting for them. Quebec had something a little over 40, then Saskatchewan came in at about thirty-two and a half, as did BC [British Columbia] and Newfoundland. And then other provinces were down lower than that. But even though we got close to 33 per cent, we didn't get any seats. And in large part, obviously we know it's because we're the only province that doesn't have totally urban seats. And of course in Manitoba where the NDP won 25 per cent of the vote, they ended up with two seats because they have urban seats and rural seats. And if our constituencies were differently configured where we had seats totally urban in Saskatoon and Regina, we would have won three or four seats last night.

And I think that's important to remember because in the review that will come between now and the next federal election, those members who live in Saskatoon and Regina, who would be better represented in their minds by people who live in their community of Regina or Saskatoon, I think have to make the pitch to the commission looking at boundaries to make sure that in Saskatchewan we have people in Saskatoon who are represented by people who live in that community if in fact the vote represents that.

So, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to say that I did want to congratulate those who were involved in the election, and not only the winners. But because, as the Premier will know, it's not only those who won last night who offered themselves up and did a yeoman service for the people of Canada, but it's also all of those people who put their name forward and lost in the election. Because doing the hard work and the months and months of running and winning, that's a special position. But spending the months and the dollars and ending up not being victorious, that's also important within the democratic system. And I just wanted to thank all of those as well.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier started out by talking about the new economic situation in the province, and I couldn't agree more that we are blessed with so much resource in this province. And whether it's oil or gas, uranium or potash or grains that are being produced that are in huge demand around the world, this is a very special time for our province. And we are really living in what is known as a global village where the potash we produce is used in India and Brazil and used in China. And decisions are made in an instant. If there's a frost in Saskatchewan, it affects the price of peas in India within hours. And it really is a very, very interesting position for our province because we are in a very, very unique position of being major producer of many of the commodities that are in great demand around the world.

Where I think we would differ is on the issue of distribution of the wealth that comes from those resources and even on how they are collected or how much are collected. And if you look back the last few months, we've been putting forward the idea of a review for potash royalties because, as we have talked about, last year in 2010 the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan made \$1.8 billion in gross revenue.

And we believe that the percentage taken by the people of Saskatchewan directly, not refunded to the Potash Corporation, I'm sure that the Premier will try to explain that we charge 20 per cent, but as he clearly knows most of that goes right back to the Potash Corporation until they pay for all of their new investment plus 20 per cent, that that deal is not in the best interest of the people of Saskatchewan. And with the rapid increase in the price of potash since the deal was originally signed for expansion of potash mines, we think a percentage of the windfall profit should be coming directly back to the people of Saskatchewan to build more daycares, to build better universities.

I don't need to talk about the roads in the province and all the new signs that talk about surface failures on our roads in this province. In the old days, a year ago, they were called potholes. And believe me, people in Shaunavon and that area still call them potholes. And the new signs that talk about surface failure, I mean it's a good spin, but they're still potholes. And people are worried about that and wondering why we don't have enough money to fix the roads in this province.

And that's why we're arguing for a better return from our potash, so that we can have lower tuition fees for students who want to go to university, who may be excluded because they don't have enough money; better roads; better schools. And so it really is no disagreement with the Premier that we have a wonderful economy that is doing very well and has been, was doing very well, as he will admit I'm sure, before he became Premier, but there is a difference of opinion on how much royalty we should collect from the potash that we produce in this province.

And also the whole issue of distribution of wealth in general because there are more and more people, as I knock on doors in my riding, as I did a little bit during the federal election in several other constituencies in the province, a feeling that if you're in the wealthy group, the top 5 per cent in the province of Saskatchewan, that it's an open ceiling to how much money you can take from the economy. If you're a CEO [chief executive officer] in a health region, you can get 20 per cent or 70 per cent and there's no limit on how much that can be. Or if you're the CEO of a private sector company, it's no upper limit. You can literally get as much as you want.

But the message from the government is if you're a working person, you need to lower your expectations. And I hear that phrase creeping into the language of the Sask Party cabinet ministers, that working people have to lower their expectations. So you end up with a situation of a tale of two cities, where the working people are told, lower your expectations, but the wealthy are becoming fabulously wealthy. And I don't say that because I'm hearing that from individual members of my caucus. That's what I'm hearing from families as I go around the province, and I wasn't hearing that two years ago. But

believe me, I'm hearing a lot about the fact that working men and women, senior citizens, many people in our society, farmers who were flooded out last year can't make ends meet. And so I think what we need to do is define a better system of sharing the massive wealth that we have in the province.

So I think, with the Premier, I'd like to agree with him. I think it is a unique time in our history. We have more wealth here than ever before. But I'm not sure that the public agree that they are part of the great revenue that's flowing into the province.

And exactly when you come to the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, we all know that 95 per cent of the people who are shareholders in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan don't live in Saskatchewan. So when we talk about the fantastic returns on shares, most of that is flowing directly out of the province of Saskatchewan.

So my question to the Premier is on the issue of the potash royalty, and I guess we can start with that, whether he has considered or reconsidered his position of not having any increase in royalties on potash for 16 years, which his minister and I believe he himself had commented on and made a commitment to the Potash Corporation?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — No. The answer is no, Mr. Chair, and the reasons are this. We support on this side of the House the changes that the Calvert administration made when Premier Calvert sat in this chair. And a number of members opposite actually sat in the cabinet of his government. They looked at the issue of potash royalties in the province. There was even at that point, some years ago, an indication that there would be an expansion of potash production in the world.

The challenge that Saskatchewan faced, rightly noted by, now a mining executive, Eric Cline, I think, and also by the premier of the day, Premier Calvert, and I think shared — I would assume at that point anyway; maybe they've changed their mind — but shared by members of the cabinet. What they understood was the truth of the matter on potash taxes which is this: when you look at all of the potash tax structure we have, and there certainly is a trigger with respect to the profit component of the potash tax, but when you look at the overall potash tax regime we have in the province today, Mr. Calvert looked at it and realized, as is the case today, that ours is the highest potash taxes in the world. In fact the next highest regime in terms of potash taxes is the Kingdom of Jordan. And we are two times as high as them in terms of our taxation rate in potash.

So I haven't talked to Mr. Calvert about this but I assume, based on his public comment and also on our own review of the situation — because we actually did conduct a potash tax review early on in our term that sought to make sure that we have a level playing field for greenfield new mines and brownfield expansion mines — what Mr. Calvert would have noted, his government would have noted that if we were to attract some of that expansion in the province . . . Because yes, we have 47 or 53 per cent of the world's potash, but 47 per cent of it is elsewhere in jurisdictions that tax potash at least at half as high a rate as we do. So I'm sure the Calvert administration decided then that if we were to attract new investment, to see

the expansion of mines in this province and new mines in this province, we had to get more competitive with places like Jordan or New Brunswick or Russia or pick your country around the world where the other half of the potash is.

So when Mr. Calvert's administration, members opposite looked at this, they decided on a temporary incentive, building in a temporary incentive so we can deal with the fact that our taxes are much higher than anywhere else and attract investment in those companies from around the world, attract their attention away from Jordan, away from other jurisdictions where half the potash is, to our province. They developed what is, I'm oversimplifying it obviously, Mr. Chair, but they developed a temporary incentive.

And when asked about it in August, on August 5, 2003, the *Leader-Post* reports that Mr. Calvert said, and I quote, about his NDP government's changes, the same changes that the NDP wish to overturn today, Premier Calvert at the time said:

I think it is more significant to have opportunities for our young people to go to work in the province first of all than to secure revenues for the General Revenue Fund of the province. Moreover, having people go to work will guarantee the latter.

The Commonwealth, the NDP publication, quoted back to 1998 actually, former minister Lautermilch on a similar, some similar logic here when he said, the lower royalties . . . He would have been talking about oil royalties at the time, but the principle remains true. Lower royalties will encourage increased activity with more capital expenditures, more drilling — because he was talking about oil — and increased activity. Close the quote.

So did it work, Mr. Chair? Did the NDP potash tax changes to try to make this province more competitive, to try to attract expansion of the mines in this province rather than elsewhere, did it work? Well, Mr. Chair, the answer is yes, it worked. That's why the Saskatchewan Party supported those changes at the time. That's why we believe we need to continue to be consistent in this.

The NDP government made these tax changes, these temporary incentives, and what did the potash companies do in good faith? They reacted to those changes. They said, we will invest in Saskatchewan — \$12 billion of investment expansion under way in the province of Saskatchewan and potentially the first new greenfield mine by the largest mining company in the world, by BHP Billiton, at Jansen Lake.

So, Mr. Chair, Mr. Calvert's logic was this, and the NDP's logic . . . The current member for Saskatoon Eastview, the current member for Regina Lakeview, the current member for Saskatoon Fairview, the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the current member for Saskatoon Fairview — I said Fairview already — the current member for Regina Dewdney, the current member for Meewasin, the current member for North Battleford, the current member for Elphinstone, they were in a cabinet. They made the decisions. And I want to tell them today, they made the right decision to change the taxes, supported by the Saskatchewan Party, because those changes attracted \$12 billion in investment and put people to work in this province and have created the very economic

advantage that the opposition leader has acknowledged exists in the province today, that puts us in a unique position.

[15:00]

Now, Mr. Chair, here's the truth of the NDP tax changes they made, ones that we support. These temporary incentives will eventually all be earned as these jobs are created. As these billions of dollars in mining expansion happens in this province, these tax incentives — they are temporary — they will be earned. And then we'll see a return to the — again to oversimplify the matter — to full taxation at rates that are two times higher than the next jurisdiction in the world that has potash, that's Jordan.

Mr. Chairman, these tax policies have helped create the Saskatchewan advantage. So it is our view that since companies acted in good faith to all those members opposite and to the Saskatchewan Party, who in opposition supported them, we ought to act in good faith. We ought not to, in the middle of these expansions say, we know we set the rules under the NDP, approved under the subsequent Saskatchewan Party government. We know we set these rules. We knew you have committed billions of dollars of investment as a result of the rules that we've set, and you're making those investments in our province. But you know what? We're going to change the rules right in midstream. We're going to change the rules in fact, Mr. Chairman, and not just have a royalty review.

Because that is not what the Opposition Leader says outside of this Assembly. For example what he says in Melville at an NDP meeting there, and I'm going to quote here, "If the NDP forms government . . ." this is April 13, 2011:

If the NDP forms government, promises Lingenfelter, a major priority will be implementing a royalty structure that could see potash companies returning up to 50 per cent of their profits to the treasury.

He says:

You could take up to 80 per cent of the profits and they still wouldn't go anywhere because the profits they make are so extreme."

Mr. Chairman, let's be clear, the NDP are not talking about a review. They're talking about a tax hike. They're talking about a job-killing tax hike that breaks faith with companies that are creating jobs for Saskatchewan families, and one other company, BHP Billiton, that's very interested in helping to build the Yorkton area of the province.

I want to be able to say to all of those companies, even though they're vilified by the NDP because every now and then when the cycle's right they make money, I want to be able to say to the PotashCorp that the deal you struck with the NDP, we honour that deal. You should honour your part and create those jobs, and they are. I want to say to Mosaic, you need to honour your part of the deal to create the jobs these tax incentives brought in by the NDP have incentivized. I want to be able to ask them to do that, Mr. Speaker. They are, or Mr. Chair, they are doing that. The same is true for Agrium, and I hope one day the same will be true for BHP Billiton.

If that party gets into power and they decide on an 80 per cent tax increase, what happens to the \$6 billion of expansion or so that's not yet complete in the industry? Do you think they might look at the other jurisdictions in the world where the other half of the potash exists? I think they might. Do you think BHP Billiton is going to come into this province and build maybe the largest mine in the world and create thousands of jobs indirectly and hundreds of job directly in what will be that largest mine? Do you think they're going to do that if a new government comes in and says we're changing the rules in mid course and we're hiking your taxes 80 per cent? I don't think so, Mr. Chair. And I don't think we want to risk the Saskatchewan advantage with that very, very reckless and dangerous policy. And I use those words advisedly.

I also want to put on the record, Mr. Chair, this very important fact. The New Democratic leader is not just advocating a royalty review for potash, he's already highlighted a 50 per cent tax hike or an 80 per cent tax hike. He has also advocated for a review of royalties of oil. We saw what that did in Alberta, Mr. Chair. In fact his former company, Nexen — and maybe he was part of the presentation as he did government relations for Nexen — his former company's presentation to the Alberta government when they considered and then implemented a royalty review and then changes, was don't do these changes because our company will probably stop investing like we are, and the oil companies will stop creating jobs in Alberta.

That was his advice to the Alberta government: don't do this royalty review; don't change royalties in mid-course. And now he's saying, Mr. Chair, on December 14th on CKRM radio news of 2010, December 14th, 2010:

If I become the premier in November of 2011, I would institute a review of all royalties in the province with the industry, whether it is potash, uranium, oil or gas because I think it's the responsibility of the government to maximize return for the shareholders.

Very interesting, Mr. Chair, because I think that member was right when he advised the Alberta government not, not to mess with their oil royalties. What happened when they did mess with the royalties of course was to the great benefit of the province of Saskatchewan when those companies came to this jurisdiction. Why? Because our royalty rates were stable. We didn't have to cut them. We just had to maintain some stability.

And until these temporary incentives are earned in a potash royalty structure, let's stay the course. Let's keep our end of the bargain and in that bargain create thousands of jobs for Saskatchewan people and see the largest potash mine in the world built. We'll be happy to campaign . . . This is a good debate to have, Mr. Chair. We welcome the debate. I thank the member for raising this. I look forward to having the debate in the upcoming general election campaign as well.

I want to say one other thing that's particularly alarming about the NDP position as it's taken shape on royalties. Because also in that *Melville Advance* article, April 13, 2011, and I'm quoting now, the newspaper says, based on their attendance at the NDP meeting, and I'm quoting. The article reports:

"If potash companies objected to the point of shutting

down operations [objecting to the tax hike, objected to the point of shutting down operations] and leaving the province, that wouldn't be a problem because Saskatchewan has mined potash before," Lingenfelter says.

Nationalization by taxation. Jack their taxes up 50 per cent, maybe 80 per cent and if they don't like it and if they leave, says the Leader of the Opposition, it's okay because we've mined potash before and we'll do it again. What he means there is, we'll nationalize the industry again. We'll have another government-owned Crown corporation, and we know the track record of that Crown corporation. It was not good, Mr. Chair. He doesn't get into the fact about whether or not the companies will be compensated or not, just that if they're going to leave the province, the government's going to step in and nationalize the industry.

Unbelievable, Mr. Chair. Now when this province has all of the opportunity in the world to continue to lead the country, we need to send out signals that we have put away the 1970s permanently, that we will not ever nationalize industries in this province again, not through high taxation, not through any other means. And so we welcome the debate that we've joined here, not just today, but in days earlier.

We welcome the frankness and the transparency of the Leader of the Opposition's position. His position is very clear. Review the royalties on oil and gas and uranium and potash, and then increase the taxes on potash 50 to 80 per cent. If the companies leave or shut down their industries because they can't make money here and they'd rather be in other country where the taxes are lower, well the government will just take it over.

Mr. Chairman, that is obviously a recipe for economic disaster for this province. And we're going to work very, very hard, very hard in the months ahead to make sure that it never comes to reality in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, I just want to say to the Premier that when the deal was struck between the potash corporations and the then Premier Calvert, the price of potash was slightly under \$200 a tonne. And when I look at the finance documents of that day, the projection for potash was a decline for the next number of years. The issue is that the price of potash didn't decrease. It has now gone up fabulously. And if the information I have here . . . There was a press release that I was just reading, that in fact the price of potash today — it's a press release from Canpotex — is not at the price that Calvert signed the deal at, at \$180, but Canpotex Ltd. today said it has concluded new sales for potash at \$520 for shipment in May and June in 2011.

Now the question isn't whether or not the potash companies should be given a refund at the price that was agreed to of \$180 a tonne. And I think there's common ground here. I think there's common ground where we can agree that the deal that was signed at \$180 a tonne stands because that's the deal that was agreed to based on the numbers that people had at that time.

But what the public don't understand is why the windfall profit between \$200 and 525, \$300 a tonne, should all go to the

foreign shareholders of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. The public says, yes, keep the deal that the government signed when the potash expansion was agreed to of \$200 a tonne. That's what they expected to get. In fact they expected to get less than that because the Finance department was projecting potash to drop off a little bit from the \$200, but instead it's more than doubled.

And why is it that the people of Saskatchewan should give all of that profit, the windfall profit, to foreign shareholders? That's the question the public's asking me. And the Premier can give that speech to them, that he doesn't want to take any more money because the foreign shareholders deserve all of the upside. But the people say back . . . And I've tested your theory with some of the public. I say, the Premier says that the \$200 a tonne that the deal was signed at, all the windfall profits are owed to the private sector shareholders. And the public say, well I don't think so; I think that's my potash and I think we should get some of it, some of it.

What would be wrong with that? And why isn't there common ground where we can say, okay, the deal that Premier Calvert signed at \$200 a tonne, we'll refund that money on the new construction because that's what we agreed to — fair enough — but the huge wealth, the windfall profit, that we should take some of it for the people of the province who own the resource? What would be wrong with that? And why can't we sit down in committee of the legislature and say, look, here was the deal signed. We want to honour that commitment. And I'm a business person as much as the Premier is. I know how to do business. I know how to negotiate. I buy lots of farm land, lots of oil stock, shares. I know how to do that. But we're being taken advantage of here as the owners of the resource. We deserve some of it, some of the upside windfall.

Now your friends in the UK [United Kingdom], the new Conservative government there, the first thing they did with oil, because oil in the North Sea is selling for a very big premium, your friends from your party, your good friends, what did they do? What did they do? They increased royalty on oil.

I'm not urging an increase in oil because we're actually being penalized at the present time for the fact that we have no pipeline to the West Coast, and the Premier will know that, that West Texas crude is selling for a huge discount. Canadian crude is being sold for about \$12 a barrel less than the Americans are importing oil from the North Sea or from other parts of the world because we only have one access for our oil. And rather than getting a premium, which we should for safe oil coming out of Canada, we're being penalized — and your members of your staff will be able to tell you that — we're being penalized about \$10 a barrel because we can only have one sales point for our oil. That's the United States.

And so what I'm trying to do is find a way that we can agree that we need to get a bit better deal on our potash. And the Premier can argue with me and say that no, it should all go to foreign investors, but you're not on the winning side of that argument. Because I know I've talked to hundreds of people and almost all of them say, we should try to negotiate a better deal, as Danny Williams did with the Hebron field in Newfoundland. And when Chevron wanted to develop that field, he said, well there's a couple of things I want. I want

some ownership of the new field, 5 per cent, and I want more royalty. And yes, Chevron argued with him. In fact they threatened him, and they threatened to leave. That's what they said. And they did leave. They left for all of eight months. And then they came back and said, well, Mr. Premier, where do we sign the deal? And yes, you can have your ownership position. That's what he did.

Now the Premier argues that Nexen was arguing against royalty increase in Alberta. That's because the royalty changes were put in place when oil was \$140 a barrel and was being implemented when oil had dropped to \$50 a barrel because of the 2008 world recession. Now had it been a other than Conservative government, they would have understood that you can't implement a royalty increase on oil based on \$140 a barrel when oil had already dropped to 50. That's not when you put an increase in place.

But this isn't what we're talking about. We're talking about potash where the present arrangement was made when potash was less than 200. It's now 525, and Bill Doyle says this is the new norm. That's what he says, indicating that it's going to probably stay there or go higher. And all of the profit, the windfall profit, the Premier is arguing should go to foreign investors. I just don't agree with that.

[15:15]

Now we can . . . I don't think we're going to get to this, but there is a position of compromise between the two positions. And that is leave the agreement as it was signed at whatever number it would come out at. If it's \$200, if it's 180, they would get all of that money refunded until their total expansions are paid out — because I agree that's what we agreed to — and that the increase of \$300 a tonne, that we would share in that windfall profit.

That's my argument. And I think that would solve your problem, because you do have a problem with the public on this, and it would solve our problem, and we could agree to that. And I think there is a middle ground. And I mean I just put it out there as an offer, and you can ridicule it or make fun of it. But I think it's a realistic offer that I think if we got . . . I think if we brought Jack Mintz and Sylvain Charlebois, if we set up a committee to review this — and I'd do it in a public way — and we brought them here, I think what they would say to us is, that is not a bad option. And I think even if you brought the potash companies to testify and to give evidence, they wouldn't say, we're going to take all of it and we deserve all of it. They're reasonable people too. And there's a huge windfall profit, and it should be shared by the people who own the resource.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition is sounding quite a different tone than he does at an NDP meeting, and more on that in a moment. What he said here today though is very interesting. He said, well here's an idea that . . . Here's some compromise position that we should raise with the potash companies in terms of their willingness to accept some sort of scheme where they might get full repayment of the costs of the expansion and then the government takes some bit more, even though we know today the structure of potash taxes in the province, inherited from the previous administration, maintained by this government, has a profit component. As the

price goes up, the revenue to the government goes up, with the temporary incentives that the NDP introduced to provide for the incentives on expansion.

But, Mr. Chairman, if this is the earnest position now of the Leader of the Opposition . . . And maybe he's trying to back away from what he said in a speech to 20 or so in Melville that he would increase potash taxes by 80 per cent, and that if they didn't like it and left the province, he'd nationalize the potash mines . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the member for Regina Walsh Acres has said — I just heard her — she said, what is he talking about?

I am talking about what her leader said at a public meeting in Melville, recorded in *The Melville Advance*, and I thank her for the opportunity to repeat it. He said, "If the NDP forms government . . ." and I'm quoting April 13th, 2011:

If the NDP forms government, promises . . . Lingenfelter, [and I'm quoting] a major priority will be implementing a royalty structure that could see potash companies returning up to 50 per cent of their profits to the provincial treasury . . .

"You could take [up to] 80 per cent of the profits and they still wouldn't go anywhere because the profits they make are so extreme . . ."

[And it goes on, Mr. Chair.] If potash companies objected to the point of shutting down operations and leaving the province, that wouldn't . . . [be] a problem because Saskatchewan has mined potash before, Lingenfelter says . . .

Like in the good old nationalization days of the 1970s, Mr. Chair, that set back the investment reputation of this province by decades, maybe longer, Mr. Chair. That's what they're saying outside of this Chamber.

But if this is his new position now — and he has several positions on potash royalties — if this is his new position, the potash companies have asked him for a meeting. They've asked that member for a meeting because of all of his pronouncements about the potash structure. We've got the letters. They copied us. He knows they've copied us. They've said to the Leader of the Opposition, if you think we ought to change the potash royalties, we would like to meet with you about that. So if the member is earnest, if this is not just about politics six months from an election where the NDP are trailing badly in the polls and they're looking for an issue, then I would ask him this: has he met with them? Has he responded to their earnest request in a letter to say, well why shouldn't we meet then if he has this idea, Mr. Chair?

He asks the question rhetorically, what do we get in return for the NDP potash incentives that he now is opposing? We got \$12 billion in expansion, thousands of construction jobs, hundreds of permanent jobs, and the Saskatchewan advantage, Mr. Chair, that is the talk of the world.

And we also got this, Mr. Chair: we got a tax structure where these temporary incentives will be completely earned over time and will return to the full rate of potash taxes, which are two

times higher than the next highest potash taxing jurisdiction in the world. That's what we'll get. It was NDP policy then, supported then by members opposite, supported by the Saskatchewan Party in opposition, and as I've said earlier, it worked.

Now he posits this notion. He says, well but prices have gone up. That's unbelievable, Mr. Chair. Well prices have changed, so we ought to try to break the deal. Mr. Chair, I wonder what he does when he forward sells canola. He's a successful farmer in this province, has been successfully farming for a time. What happens when he forward sells, when he does a contract on a specialty crop and the price goes up? Maybe canola hits \$20. Does he just break, can he break the deal and say, you know, when we made this deal the price was here, but gosh the price is a lot higher, so I want to unilaterally break this deal?

Or what if, as the Minister of Health has pointed out — and I hope this has never happened to him personally — what happens, Mr. Chair, if he forward sells, he contract sells a specialty crop and the price of that crop crashes? And what if that company then came to him and said, you know what? The price is a lot lower now. We'd like to give you a lot less for your canola, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. I think he'd probably say, no that's not the deal.

Well we have a deal in this province today that is creating an advantage for us, that is creating thousands of jobs for Saskatchewan families, that is attracting \$12 billion worth of investment into the potash sector, that is making us the story of the world in terms of world markets and mining. Mr. Chair, we say, let's not lose that, this advantage.

And you know, Mr. Chair, the hon. member says several times, well this is what people are telling me about how much they like my idea about nationalization through high taxation. Well, Mr. Chairman, that's not what we're hearing. The city of Humboldt says:

We believe there's a need for a period of stability to support the growth and development of the potash industry in our province and allow our communities to attract the interest and confidence of new residents and new business ventures. Discussions regarding changes in royalty and taxation policy should not be brought forward in the midst of this significant growth phase.

The city of Humboldt should understand this. We made a deal. That deal's working on behalf of Saskatchewan taxpayers creating jobs. Now we ought not to go midstream and break the deal, as I'm sure the member would not want companies he deals with from an agricultural standpoint.

What about the town of Colonsay? They said this, and I quote, in a letter:

This letter is to advise you that I am not in favor of raising the royalties on Potash in Saskatchewan. Business . . . [arrangements] to set royalties were made between the province [under the NDP, the right changes] and the potash companies and I do not think the government should renege on those agreements now.

The quote continues:

Our community is seeing growth largely due to the Potash Industry and we don't want to lose residents and future housing because of issues between the Potash . . . [industry] and the Provincial Government. We want Saskatchewan to remain the place to be for all . . .

And I don't think raising royalties is a way to encourage this, Mr. Chair. That's what communities that would be directly affected by this reckless NDP policy are saying. And, Mr. Chair, I respectfully submit to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if he wants to campaign on that potentially ruinous policy on nationalizing the potash industry after he's jacked up their taxes 80 per cent and killing thousands of jobs for Saskatchewan families, if he wants to campaign on that, we'll be happy, Mr. Chairman, to campaign precisely on that issue in the months ahead and in the next general election, Mr. Chair.

I also want to put on the record this again because the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not talking about it any more. In the ads that their caucus ran, paid for by public funds, it wasn't just potash royalties that they were going to hike, it was uranium. It was uranium. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition doesn't talk about it at all any more. Maybe it's because companies like Areva have said, we wish to clearly state that we would be very concerned if there was an about-face to the process that is well along or, worse, a royalty or royalty-like tax increase which would further hinder the economic viability of those projects.

Mr. Chairman, in the case of Areva, there's significant activity in northern Saskatchewan. In the case of the world's largest uranium mining company, a product of a privatization called Cameco, headquartered in the city of Saskatoon, Mr. Chairman, I can report to you that just under 50 per cent of the workforce in those uranium mines is First Nations and Métis people. And I have not yet heard from the member for Cumberland or the member for Athabasca about the NDP's caucus position to put at risk hundreds of jobs, half of which, almost half of which thankfully are employing Aboriginal people in our province in the uranium mining sector because . . . The deputy leader shakes her head. Her ads that her caucus funds, taxpayers' money paid for, said it'd increase royalties for uranium too.

And, Mr. Chairman, I would also point out again, on CKRM in December 2010 the Leader of the Opposition said he was going to increase oil royalties as well. He's going to do, I should say, he's going to do a review of oil royalties. Mr. Chairman, this is not the right policy for the province of Saskatchewan.

I would offer finally, back to the issue on potash, the following comment on the issue of the new potash structure we have in the province today and implemented by the NDP. And I'm reading from an internal briefing document. This document was presented to the NDP government in 2005. Mr. Chairman, here's what the officials of the government of the NDP government of the day advised the former ministers that sit opposite today. It says, "If the government had failed to provide tax relief . . ." This is after the fact, after the NDP made the changes that they're now opposing:

If the government had failed to provide tax relief it may have encouraged the industry, particularly PCS, to look to

other jurisdictions for some of its expansion requirements even though the expansions available in Saskatchewan may be as attractive or even more attractive.

Mr. Calvert got it. Mr. Calvert understood it. And now, Mr. Chairman, the position of the NDP is, well the price has gone up so let's break the deal.

I would offer this, Mr. Chairman. I think the Leader of the Opposition should want to work with potash companies in the same way he'd expect companies that he deals with when he forward sells canola or enters into a speciality crop contract. If the price changes, he can't just break the deal especially if the deal is good for the province, is creating jobs for Saskatchewan families. We stand by the position of the province. We stand by the unprecedented growth that is being created by the royalty structure currently existing in Saskatchewan.

The Chair: — Mr. Lingenfelter.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to say to the Premier that obviously he feels this obligation to defend the corporations whether they're royal corporations or potash. I think his role is not to defend the boards of directors of corporations, but to defend the people of Saskatchewan.

And if his argument is that he can't change royalty because somehow that's not in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan, you're getting paid by the wrong group. The fact is your job and responsibility is to get maximum return for your shareholders, not for Bill Doyle's shareholders. He's doing quite a good job on his own. He does a very good job; that's why he gets the big bucks. And I'm not critical of Bill Doyle. I think that he's doing very, very well for his shareholders. What I'm worried about and what I'm hearing from the public of Saskatchewan, you're not doing the best job possible for the shareholders who own the resource.

And I think making a commitment that you're not going to change royalties for 16 years, let me tell you this about contracts with canola — there isn't a farmer in the world that would agree with you on that. If somebody's going to contract canola for 16 years and somehow feel obliged that you're never going to change it, that's not a contract. There is no such contract with the potash corporation. The fact is that even the potash companies know that they could and should be paying more. Are they going to offer it up? Well I don't expect that they will. If I was sitting in their chairs, I wouldn't be coming and saying look, we want to pay a little bit more royalty. I'd be trying to get even a better deal.

But the key is, what do the public of Saskatchewan need? And they deserve more. And what they're saying is that they want a review, and they think the upside of the windfall profits that they should get a piece of that.

On the issue of agriculture, there's just a couple of questions that I want to ask. One of them comes from the flooding that's going on across the province and that happened last year, the 10 million acres or about 10 million acres that either were not seeded because of flooding or, once they were seeded, they were flooded out. That same area of the province, a large part of it with the big snowstorm last weekend, is once again facing

these kind of circumstances.

I wonder whether or not the flood announcement that, the letter you got from the Prime Minister during the election campaign — and I have a copy of it here I can quote from, but I'm sure you know the one I'm referring to — where they offered up to pay 50 cents on the dollar, did that apply to infrastructure only and was there a cap on it, or will it apply to flooded acres in the province if in fact they don't get seeded? And of course what we really want is the sun comes out and the wind dries up the ground and they get it seeded. But is there anything in that agreement that would allow for a payment for unseeded acres?

[15:30]

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I thank the hon. member for the question. His preamble though related to the previous subject of royalty changes, and so I wish to address again some of what was in his preamble. And then I'll happily do my best to answer his question with respect to flooding.

Mr. Chair, I want to state again something I alluded to earlier on only in a cursory way in our exchange here this afternoon, and that is this: our government did conduct a de facto potash royalty review upon assuming office. We had a problem in the potash tax changes that the NDP had made, because there was a disparate . . . there was an imbalance in terms of the tax treatment on greenfield new mines that we want to attract and brownfield expansions. And companies quite rightly were pointing out and saying lookit, if you want us to expand our mines, we need some equity in terms of the treatment of a new mine versus a greenfield project.

I can also tell the member that there were other changes made to improve on the NDP incentives that were approved by many members opposite, though of course in principle, as I've said, we agreed with them. In fact we improved the system of incentives that were implemented by the NDP, introduced by the NDP, by putting in a tax floor. This better ensured of course that Saskatchewan people were getting their fair share. The NDP system that we inherited would have allowed producers to lower their tax rate by expanding indefinitely. And so at some point, there needs to be a return to full, there needs to be a return to full taxation for the end of the temporary incentive.

So as a result, this government introduced a tax floor that said basically this: that at least 35 per cent of the producers' production will be subject to profit tax. And that's the part of the tax that of course accommodates the fact that as prices go up, so does the revenue to the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan.

I would also say this to the honourable member, if he's sincere now and strikes a much more earnest tone than he did in Melville when he wanted to nationalize the industry if they walked away from an 80 per cent potash tax hike — that's what he said, and we'll be talking a lot about that in the months ahead — if he's got a different position today, why hasn't he accepted the invitation of the potash producers to meet with him?

They sent him a letter on January 28th. The letter concludes this, this is their position obviously and the honourable member will understand they're not necessarily in agreement with changes, but they say in the conclusion of their letter, those projects could — they're talking about the expansions with a royalty increase — they say those projects could be delayed or cancelled, which would result in severely impacting GDP [gross domestic product] growth and provincial jobs. Changing the rules part way through the game would have an adverse effect on Saskatchewan as an investment jurisdiction. Then they say, "The Saskatchewan Potash Producers Association executive would be pleased to sit down with you to discuss this matter at a mutually accepted time."

So if the NDP leader is serious about this issue, if he has some earnest proposal to find some midway point between what he describes, depicts our position and his, why wouldn't you meet with industry? Why wouldn't you pitch them on this? When he met with BHP Billiton, did he raise this idea that he has today? No, Mr. Chair, I don't think that's occurred. If it has, I stand corrected.

But I encourage that member to accept the invitation of the potash industry that he wants to change markedly, if he ever is to sit on this side of the House, to sit and meet with them and find out about their implications and of the changes that they would make, and maybe pitch this new idea that he has. And in the meantime, in the meantime, the damage is probably done. But he may wish to reconsider his policy now which speaks very clearly of increasing taxes between 50 and 80 per cent, and as the industry walks away from expansions or their assets, just nationalizing them. Just taking them over like some throwback to the 1970s or to some state that we don't want to use as an example at all for growth in the province of Saskatchewan.

He also again rhetorically asks a question about the shareholders that we should represent. Mr. Chair, you know I believe strongly that, and I think all members agree and the Leader of the Opposition agrees, that our shareholders are the people of the province, each and every one of them — seniors and moms and dads and kids and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, north and south. We owe to them this, Mr. Chair: we owe to them not just short-term politically motivated policies that might provide some immediate political solution to either of our parties, and we're all guilty of that perhaps from time to time.

But in these large issues of the future of the province and of the economy that pays for the quality of life that we prize in Saskatchewan, we owe to them to not succumb to political expediency, as I would suggest to you the NDP are, on this issue of royalties. We owe to them the long term.

We owe to them the long view that understands that \$12 billion worth of new investment because of these NDP tax changes that were made, supported by us, is a good thing for the province. It's creating not just economic opportunity today but for generations to come — 3,900 direct jobs, Mr. Chairman. We owe it to the people of this province to act in the manner that makes sure we are considering the long term.

And we're going to continue to do that. These temporary incentives will be earned, revenues will return, or I should say

the amount of tax paid will return to levels that were there previously. And in the meantime, the work of the incentives will have been done because this province will be transformed by new citizens and new people engaged in work and employment in the province, and by new investment.

Mr. Chair, with respect to the flood issue, I had a couple of conversations with the Prime Minister. And obviously it was a little bit difficult for the relationship, the provincial-federal relationship to happen as it usually does because of the federal election. But I appreciated the fact that the Prime Minister took a couple of occasions to call, and we were able to have a chat about what was going on in the province. Early on, you know, most of the conversation was just a general report on where we were at. At that point, even the situation in Swift Current, my hometown where I took the call, wasn't even that well known as to how high the water would eventually get.

The second call though took place in what I would call sort of the middle of the significant trouble that we're having in the province. And we made the case, as did Premier Selinger quite effectively in Manitoba, that we would be grateful and request some support from the federal government to help with mitigation costs. You'll remember, Mr. Chair, that our government announced early in the year that we were setting aside \$22 million for things like the temporary water dikes, for sandbagging machines, sandbags, for earth works, for berms, and we made that available to communities and quite successfully.

We also announced some time later that if there needed to be more of that, maybe up to \$30 million according to estimates from CPSP [Corrections, Public Safety and Policing], that we'd make that available as well. So the province of Manitoba had said to the federal government, and we made the same case, that permanent works as a result of this money, a permanent infrastructure works — and I would argue even purchases that we hadn't have made, that wouldn't have made otherwise, like the water dikes and the sandbagging machines perhaps — be eligible for a 50 per cent contribution from the feds. And we'll most certainly continue to make that case, although obviously we have this assurance from the Prime Minister in a written form. We're grateful for that.

We did not talk in detail about unseeded acreage that is a potential as a result of a very wet spring. Mr. Chair, you will remember last spring when it occurred. Again I had a chance to call the Prime Minister and discuss the issue that was very severe. It never reached 12 million acres, but at the time, I think, we were estimating about 12 million acres of unseeded acreage. And within days, they had people on the ground, and we were able to announce a federal-provincial, cost-share initiative to help with that initiative.

So, Mr. Chair, we're watching the situation carefully with respect to the agriculture situation. And more than watching, we took action in the budget as we increased the, through crop insurance, we increased the coverage from 50 to \$70 an acre for any unseeded acreage as a result of flooding. So we've taken that action. We're monitoring it, Mr. Chairman. I would say that the best indicator of future action is past action. We have a relationship with the federal government that produced results for producers. Obviously some wanted more. That's the way it

always is. But it did produce some help for those who were facing the challenge of unseeded acreage. And we're monitoring that situation carefully.

And in the meantime, if I can, just one final point to the Leader of the Opposition and through this Assembly to the officials of government: the public service of this province have responded remarkably well to the flooding situation in various ministries, certainly in CPSP, but in Environment, Watershed Authority, and Social Services. And we are very well served in this province by their dedication and their work with municipal leaders and individuals that are facing the calamity of flooding. And so we acknowledge and thank them. And in the Crowns as well, as the Minister of SaskPower has pointed out, we thank and acknowledge them.

And if there's a follow-up question with respect to coverage on unseeded acreage, well I do my best to mention that. Thanks . . . or to do that. Thanks.

The Chair: — The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Just continuing on a couple of short questions on the flooding and the problems associated with the 10 million acres that weren't seeded last year. And while the Premier is right — there was a small payment made by the province and provincial government for the unseeded acres last year — if you're in that area, Elfros and area where in cases only 20 per cent was seeded, in some cases with organic farmers who were waiting for the ground to get ready before they seeded last spring, some of them didn't seed any, and they were expecting more than 25 or \$30 an acre. The request was for 100. And the Premier knows that it didn't come anywhere near meeting that need, which then backs it up into this year. Many of them are having a difficult time getting enough money to put the seed in the ground, buy the fuel. Fuel is up 25 per cent. Fertilizer is up 30 per cent.

But the biggest hit is the rate increase for crop insurance. And what they're having a difficult time is understanding how on the 10 million acres that went unseeded, how there can be a 30 per cent increase in the insurance rate on that particular land. And what we've been asking the Premier for, if he would look at it — he knows I've asked the Minister of Agriculture — but I'd ask him here today whether or not there wouldn't be a way with the federal government in Ottawa to find a way that the increase for this year only on the acres that weren't seeded last year, if there could be some sort of forgiveness for that increase for one year.

Because to add hardship to injury, the fact is they didn't get any crop last year. They did get a small payment from the provincial government and federal, and they are thankful for that and I don't want to make it sound like they're not. But it certainly wasn't the \$100 an acre they were asking for. But then when they go to do their seeding this year, they're facing flooding, late snowstorms, huge increase in diesel fuel, in fertilizer prices, and then crop insurance rates going up on the very land they didn't get any crop on.

And what we're asking for is whether or not, on their behalf, there would be a way that the federal government would agree, if a request were made by the Assembly, to forgo the increase

on the unseeded acres from last year, in 2010.

The Chair: — Before the Premier, recognize the Premier, I would ask him to introduce the new official that has joined us before he answers the question.

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to welcome Tim Highmoor, the chief of staff to the Minister of Agriculture who's battling his own personal flood near Saltcoats today — not Tim, the minister.

Mr. Chair, I want to offer a couple of comments to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition with respect to his questions: one specific with respect to those who had acreage flooded out in 2010 and their implications for 2011, and then a more general comment about the changes this government has made to crop insurance over the last three years.

Mr. Chair, we want to assure this Assembly that acreage flooded in 2010 is not going to penalize any of the payments for producers in terms of the 2011 year.

I can say this as well, Mr. Chair. One thing we heard from producers loud and clear in opposition — and then worked hard to implement in government and have in each of 2008, 2009, 2010 — we have tried to respond to their request to increase the coverage in this province, increase the per acreage coverage available under crop insurance. Mr. Chair, the most recent changes that the hon. member is critical of I think have been supported by APAS [Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan]. I think they've been supported by SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. I think they've also been supported by the canola growers.

Mr. Chair, because of this, yes there is an increase of about, on average, \$1.47 per acre in terms of the premium. But there's also been an attendant increase in coverage per acre on an average of \$42. So we now have average coverage in the province of Saskatchewan of about \$173 per acre, the highest that it has ever been. Yes, it comes with a bit of a premium increase, but obviously I think the minister and I think the government's gotten it right because, Mr. Chair, we have farm groups saying this is the right thing to do.

As for agricultural producers who are facing unique challenges, Mr. Chairman, we have a solid record in this regard as well. When we first came to office the cattle industry was under significant stress — there are signs of hope today, but it was under significant stress — and we began with a loan program. And many producers said, you know, we don't really need more loans right now, but the uptake on it was reasonably positive. But we came with that loan program, and then later on we also came with a per-head payment. We didn't wait. It was pretty clear the federal government wasn't necessarily interested in it at that particular time, and so we went ahead on a unilateral basis and we were there again for cattle producers on a per-head payment.

Last spring when so many acres were under water, here again we were able to reach out to the federal government and build on a relationship that isn't perfect but better than it was under

the previous administration, and get some work done on behalf of producers who needed some help with respect to unseeded acreage.

Mr. Chair, when it comes to the drought in the Southwest, that was largely ignored by the previous administration. We also worked with SARM and farm groups to implement some very important infrastructure initiatives to help with respect to water, to help with respect to the drought in terms of on-farm wells and other important water infrastructure that was also welcomed by the producers. And here again we should acknowledge the federal government's support and partnership with that particular initiative.

Mr. Chairman, that's a record of action on the part of this government. And producers should know this: that we're going to continue to be with, to stand with them as they face what is an increasing array of challenges, it seems, in this province, of most lately the flooding and the amount of moisture that we have in the province of Saskatchewan.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — I appreciate the comments by the Premier, but I do want to reiterate that as the days go by, and the fields in many areas of the province not drying as usual, this problem continues to grow. But as the Deputy Premier has said, we haven't lost a crop ever in the province in April. Well now we're into May and we can say that again in May. But we certainly, I think, need a strategy, and it should be cost-shared with the federal government to help those farmers in the area of Yorkton and Elfros and Wynyard where the large amount of flooding occurred last year, if that area continues to be flooded and the crop doesn't get seeded.

I wanted to ask another question about the agriculture, and it relates to a debate that will happen fairly soon, I would expect, with the federal government, and that is around the issue of the Canadian Wheat Board. Having worked with the Canadian Wheat Board and met with them a few months ago — I guess it's about a year ago now when I last met with them in Winnipeg — and talking about changes and updates that are important within the Canadian Wheat Board, I wonder if the Premier could outline what the position of the government is in terms of our relationship with the federal government as related to the Canadian Wheat Board.

And just so the Premier knows, I think it's important, that regardless of our political philosophy, that we understand the Canadian Wheat Board is an instrument and tool of Canadian farmers. And I would urge that if any changes are to be made, they would only be made with the consent of the farmers who are affected because I think this is an issue that goes beyond whether you're Conservative, Liberal, or NDP. And I don't think New Democrats should be calling the shots on the Canadian Wheat Board or the Conservative Party. I think it's an institution that should be managed by farmers and decisions made about its future should be called by farmers.

So what I would urge the Premier is to outline his position, but also urge that coming to a conclusion, that this institution in Canada, if changes are to be made going forward, that they only

be made with the consent of farmers most affected.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Thank the member for the question. Just touching again on the areas where the flooding is again acute this year and was very problematic last year in terms of agriculture, the hon. member asked about the relationship between the provincial and the federal government. Again here, as I've said earlier on in a discussion with the media, we don't get everything we want from the federal government. But what we have had is a productive relationship when it comes to agricultural issues, I think to the benefit of producers who, as I said early in an answer, would probably always wish that programs would be a little bit more efficient, maybe even a little bit richer. But by and large we've seen some results that just wasn't the case under the previous administration for producers. And I think it's an indicator of what might happen down the road should the need arise again in this province.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee and the Leader of the Opposition as well, that the ministers' offices have been discussing what might be coming down the road as the weeks wear on and the moisture issue is not abating in the province. Moreover officials are also continuing to, between the provincial government and the federal government, continue to be in contact to discuss what might be needed down the road in this province, depending on the agricultural situation in Saskatchewan.

With respect to the Wheat Board, our party supports marketing choice. That's always been the case. We are a provincial party. We do not have a federal affiliate. We fielded no candidates in the last federal election, Mr. Chair. But when asked on the issue, that's the position of the party. We do know, again there's been recent elections with respect to Wheat Board directors. A preponderance of those directors, I think it's fair to characterize, are not necessarily in favour of choice or changes to the board. I guess it'll be up to the federal government as to how they will deal with that situation.

We do all have varying positions, I would say, in the Legislative Assembly on the issue. I know, I think the Leader of the Opposition is in favour of marketing choice as well. As a producer I think he has counselled our shared Member of Parliament in southwest Saskatchewan, Mr. Anderson, that the government should move on the issue of marketing choice. So this is an issue that's he right to . . . The producers have different opinions on it. We've taken a position. Ultimately the federal government is going to have to deal with this issue now that they have a majority mandate.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — I want to turn now to an issue that continually is raised throughout Saskatchewan. And it doesn't seem to be restricted to Regina and Saskatoon, but Kindersley, Estevan, and that's the issue of housing and the lack of affordable housing in the province of Saskatchewan. And obviously there are a number of people who are simply living in conditions that aren't suitable for families. They can't find

affordable housing. When they can, they then don't have enough money for other necessities in life. And it comes back to this issue of who's winning from the booming economy in Saskatchewan.

There's no doubt that we have a very strong economy based on resources. But when you talk to some of the people who are affected by huge rent increases, and I used the example the other day of an apartment here in Regina just south of the Legislative Building, where rent increases were going up 60, 70, up to 100 per cent. And many of the residents who lived in that building were saying they just didn't know what to do because most of them were on a fixed income, either a pension or they were working at near minimum wage. And to pay an extra \$500 a month in one rent increase, which some of them were being told their rent would go up, they were saying to us, why can't you go to the legislature and get rent controls similar to what other Canadians have in place?

Because as we know, 80 per cent of Canadians have some form of rent control. It's not a perfect world, but at least it gets a number of families through a situation. In Manitoba for example, in 2010 rent control was pegged at, or rent increases were capped at 1 per cent. And you can talk about new systems of rent control where you exclude the construction or newly constructed apartments. You can also exclude what are called mom-and-pop operations where if some family owns one rental unit or two rental units, you can have an exclusion. I think this is the case in Manitoba where they exclude three rental units per family because that's not the major issue.

But what I wanted to ask the Premier is, first of all on affordable housing and the whole issue of rent control, can the Premier outline why his resistance? He has admitted that there is a huge issue around rent increases. But can the Premier tell us again why he is so adamantly opposed to the new generation or the new style of rent control that would exclude new construction, so you get the best of both worlds?

In Winnipeg for example, last year they had 800 starts on rental units. In all of the province of Saskatchewan without rent control we had less than that. And I just don't understand and many Saskatchewan residents don't understand at the Premier's hesitance even to look at alternatives around rent control.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. You know, in a growing economy there are challenges. There are infrastructure challenges especially if there was already a significant infrastructure deficit, which was the case in the province. It's something we inherited. There are challenges also around housing, and there are affordability issues. So just in a general way, Mr. Chair, we've worked very hard, imperfectly to be sure, but we've worked very hard to make sure that we were addressing affordability issues, that people in this province were a part of the growth, the unprecedented growth that we were seeing.

That's why our first major tax change, Mr. Chair, was a move to actually increase the basic exemption that dropped 90,000 people from the provincial tax rolls. That's why additional changes to that basic exemption and the child tax credit will

mean 114,000 total people that used to pay provincial income tax under the previous administration now will pay no provincial income tax in the province.

It's why we were able to make unprecedented investments, Mr. Chair, in Social Services for example. It's why we were able to move towards indexing rental allowances for those who are in particular need of accommodation help. Mr. Chair, that never existed before in the province. And as far as we could tell, it existed in two other places in the country, where by region — and we had different inflation rates in terms of housing costs in different parts of the province — we've implemented a system with the help of the professional public service whereby those rents are now indexed automatically for the inflation that they face in those particular regions. There have been a number of initiatives in terms of those who are most vulnerable that we've initiated through Social Services dealing directly with shelter allowances, dealing directly with housing.

Mr. Chair, we also released very recently a five-point plan with respect to the housing issue that includes Headstart on a Home, the expected result will be 1,000 new units. It includes the affordable homeownership program, 600 new units; that includes rental construction incentives that will result in 2,900 new units; 34 million in direct public investment in new and existing rental units with the expecting result is 160 new units and extensive renovations and upgrades to rental units across the province.

Mr. Chairman, what we found out in government was that some of the public housing was in such a state that it wasn't suitable for people to actually live in. So we made the decision to make a significant investment. The Minister of Social Services announced a \$34 million direct investment, again together with the federal government, to make sure that we were taking care of the inventory of housing that already exists. This is in addition to 860 new public housing units that have been opened up across the province in the three and a half years of our government for 80 million. It includes 1,100 more that are in various stages of development — an increased funding to housing programs by approximately 69 per cent since the NDP's last full year in government.

[16:00]

Mr. Chairman, it also represents unprecedented, as least in the contemporary history of the province, investment in student housing. There is a continuum of housing we need to deal with. Housing for those most vulnerable, we need to make sure that accommodation allowances fit that group, that are appropriate for that group.

Low-income people, we need to be improving supply by working with municipalities who have incentives for down payments on new units. We have incentives for the construction of rental units. Then there's the new housing, first-time homeowner part of the continuum. We have Headstart on a Home for that initiative, Mr. Chairman, as well as, again, some of the other public units we're supplying.

And then an important part of the continuum is student housing, Mr. Chair. As we know in September the housing situation — and it's still pretty tight right now, although a lot of the students

have left Saskatoon and Regina perhaps for summer jobs elsewhere; not all of them, but lots — but we know in the school year, the housing challenge is particularly acute in those places that have post-secondary institutions, not just our university cities but also where SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] have campuses across the province.

Mr. Chair, here our track record is one that I'm quite proud of, though more needs to be done. In Meadow Lake, the \$2.3 million expansion for the North West Regional College housing, 40 unit complex to accommodate 94 students and family members; in La Ronge, six four-bedroom and two five-bedroom units will be constructed there; at the SIAST Woodland Campus, 2.5 million for 34 two-bedroom townhouses and two-bedroom suites with wheelchair accessibility; in Saskatoon, the College Quarter, 15 million worth of government contribution principally at the University of Saskatchewan, 400 new beds or places for students to stay; Cress student housing in Saskatoon, 27 new units.

Mr. Chairman, our commitment to student residence, 3,000 per cent funding increase since those folks were in office. And when those students have more places to stay that are related to student housing, it eases the pressure with respect to rental accommodations in the centres where there are those post-secondary institutions. So, Mr. Chairman, we know there's a challenge. We're working to meet the challenge with supply.

What we are not prepared to do . . . And you know, Mr. Chair, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition characterizes what they've done in Manitoba as very successful. Others don't share his view. Others worry about the dilapidation of the existing inventory where this new generation rent control has a sort of an asymmetric treatment, Mr. Chair. They worry about the lack of an incentive for landlords to take care of their properties. We can get into the debate about Manitoba. And he has information, and we have our information.

We're going to continue to build supply. We're going to continue to work with the municipality sector. We know that at the housing summit there was a great deal of support for the direction of the government. Yes, the challenge still exists, but I can tell you this, Mr. Chair, vacancy rates are up across the province, not as high as we'd like them, but they're up province-wide from 1.9 per cent to 2.5 per cent in the last year; Saskatoon, 1.9 per cent to 2.6 per cent; Regina, point six per cent to 1 per cent.

The truth is this, Mr. Chairman: vacancy rates in the province of Saskatchewan are higher now, not high enough, but higher now than they were under those members opposite when they were the government. And it would have been nice if this province had a bit of a head start on the housing challenge that we exist, if the previous administration would've begun the work when it needed to begin, when vacancy rates were even tighter, when the housing shortage was even more acute under their administration than ours.

But we can't change the past. We can only work towards the future. We've laid out a plan to do that, Mr. Chair. We're still consulting and getting input from those who are on the front lines of the issues in the municipal sector. And we're going to

continue to work to build new houses with the private sector and with public funds. We're going to continue to address supply all along the continuum from student housing to helping those who are most vulnerable. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, not to sound ungrateful on behalf of the people that are calling our office and saying they've got huge problems with paying their rent, the fact of the matter is there simply is a huge problem with affordable housing in the province and part of it is rental, part of it is the very units you talk about.

Many of them in fact, the amount of money that you have to have in order to buy them, many of these units are \$300,000. And it may not sound like much to the Premier, but if you have to raise 30,000 or \$40,000 in cash, that's just not in the ballpark for most young people, for many other families. They just don't have that kind of money. And for many of them, if you're at minimum wage or near minimum wage, you're never going to have 30 or \$40,000 in cash because as fast as you save, the price of housing is going up even faster. And they can't catch up. They're on a treadmill.

And not that I don't agree with the Premier that there are a lot of planning going on, a lot of paper, a lot of red tape. But for the people who live in the apartment that I was talking about where they got notice of a 60 per cent increase, they don't know any of these programs, and they can't use any of the programs. And the fact . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well if the minister who says from her seat, they are, if she can go there and help them through this, it would be very much appreciated.

Because when I was talking to them, they simply don't have access. They say they don't know the program, they don't understand it, and they're facing a 60 per cent increase in rent. And even the Premier during question period, I think he used the words that this is unacceptable. Well if it is unacceptable, what are we putting in place to make sure these people who have these rent increases coming in the next few months are in a position to pay the increases that are being called for?

And again the rent control . . . We may be the only ones that understand rent control in this province, but 80 per cent of Canadians have rent control — Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia — and it works. Because in Manitoba where you have the difference of a cap of 1 per cent or in Regina where some people have 60 per cent, that's fairly significant on the income of a working person or someone on a pension.

And I just urge the Premier to really take a serious look at rent control or a rent cap to see whether or not again there is some common ground that we could protect those who need protection from what is gouging. There's no question about it. When somebody's calling for a 60 per cent increase or 40 per cent increase on an existing apartment, I don't know what other term you can use except gouging. Why wouldn't the Premier and his cabinet step in and protect those families? And again, if there's any way that the opposition could be helpful in that, we would like to do that.

The other thing on affordable housing: this isn't the first time in the history of the province that we have had a shortage of housing. There have been many other times. And I can remember, the member for Cypress Hills will remember, when Olaf Friggstad was manufacturing farm equipment and there was a huge shortage of housing in Frontier. And at that time Olaf Friggstad, a good friend of all of ours from southwest Saskatchewan, came to the government. He was no New Democrat or socialist, but he said, look, what's holding my manufacturing plant up is the lack of housing. Is there anything the government can do to help with housing?

And the federal government, provincial government, along with the private sector, I think the local community went in, and the member from Cypress may remember, but built 30 or 40 affordable housing. And then major expansions of the plant took place. Flexi-Coil later bought out that plant. It was then bought out by Case International and they now employ 1,000 people or 1,200 people in Saskatoon. But it all started in a little shop south of Frontier, and in part survived because housing was provided, affordable housing, by provincial, federal, and local government, along with the private sector.

And what we can't understand is why after four years of being in government, you're still at the stage of trying to scratch your head and figure out a housing program. It really isn't that complicated. There are many models around Canada that would stand out where the provincial, federal, local government, along with the private sector, just goes and builds a house. It doesn't take that long. And these are affordable housing. In three, four months you can get these houses up and operating. They can be affordable. They can be under \$200,000 a unit. And working people can afford it and have the pride of ownership. I'm not arguing for government-owned housing, I'm arguing that government have a role to play in quickly putting in place housing so that many of these businesses can continue to expand.

So I just want to ask again whether or not has the Premier totally ruled out any form of rent control, or is there still some opening if properly lobbied and put forward, we could achieve some protection for renters in this province?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for the question. You know, on the issue of rent control, the NDP have looked at this issue extensively both in government early on in the '90s when the hon. member was part of the cabinet of the Romanow government and they decided actually to do away with rent control that existed in the province. In 1992, on the 6th of July, 1992, the Hon. Ms. Simard moved second reading on Bill No. 61, *An Act to amend The Residential Tenancies Act* where "All rent review and rent control provisions will also be repealed."

Now the hon. member can say, well things have changed since then. Things were changing. If you listen to the New Democrats, they'll say things were changing, you know, beginning probably six, seven years ago as the economy really started to grow. And as I've already pointed out in this debate, Mr. Chairman, vacancy rates were actually lower. In other words the housing shortage was more acute and tighter when

they were still in office, so remember that, Mr. Chair. The housing shortage was more acute as measured by vacancy rates when the New Democratic Party was the government of Saskatchewan.

They looked at rent control again. They did a study on rent control on the eve of that '07 election. The current MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Saskatoon Eastview told reporters — and now I'm quoting from *The StarPhoenix* article — told reporters "recent consultations with the housing industry and representatives of community-based groups who work with the poor showed no real appetite exists for establishing rent control."

There's other comments from the hon. member for Saskatoon Eastview who was a critic at the time when the housing shortage was certainly as acute as it is today, maybe more so if measured by vacancy rates. But more to the point, Mr. Chair, there is a official report to the government presented September 19, 2007, called housing in Saskatchewan, community partners meeting, consultation summary, and here's what it says, and I quote:

Although there was a mixed response regarding rent controls, the general conclusion was that rent controls create uncertainty and will lead to a decline in housing availability and quality as rent controls would be a disincentive for investment.

So the NDP government of the day accepted that report and publicly rejected rent controls. Interesting to note the language in this report, and I draw members' attention to it. It says that views were mixed on rent control much as they are in this Assembly. Some people think it's the answer and others are concerned about what it might do to long-term supply or the state, under the new Manitoba model, the state of the current inventory of supply of housing.

So, Mr. Chair, things haven't changed much from 2007. There are still mixed views. The housing vacancy rate, it was more acute under them in terms of being a problem than it is under us. That part has changed. And we though still agree with this particular report that the NDP commissioned and agreed with in 2007 "that rent controls create uncertainty and will lead to a decline in housing availability and quality as rent controls would be a disincentive for investment." Mr. Chair, that's why we've focused on supply. That's why at the housing summit we engaged discussion on what's possible in working with municipalities to provide an incentive from education tax rebates, for example, on the construction of new rental properties, new apartment buildings.

We haven't seen that kind of construction in a generation across the country. Premiers talked about it at the Council of the Federation. Not since the end of MURBs [multiple unit residential building] have there really been any interest in, much interest, certainly significant interest in the construction of rental accommodations across the country. So we're moving to provide incentives for that in partnership with the municipal sector. We're moving to make sure we're helping those most vulnerable by indexing shelter allowances, by first of all increasing those shelter allowances.

We're moving on the issue of student housing to increase supply now and for the long term. The last time there was student housing built at the University of Saskatchewan was, I think, in the mid-'70s. The hon. member was working hard in the . . . was about to be elected soon to the legislature. And that's, well I mean, Mr. Chair, he was doing that and other people were doing it. The bottom line is it was a long time ago in terms of the measure of when there has been new student housing at the University of Saskatchewan.

So we're addressing this matter on the entire continuum of housing. We're going to do it in a way that we believe is consistent with what works in the long term.

[16:15]

I guess again we can get into a debate about what others are weighing in on in terms of Manitoba, where reports have come out and there's been some reportage in the daily papers for example about some of the discussion where one particular professor, who is very familiar with what the Manitoba government has done, suggests that Manitoba rent control might even drive rents higher. He says that's because rehabilitation programs extend exemptions from regulations ranging from two to five years, and when a landlord undertakes capital expenditures on a rental unit, the rent is allowed to increase.

Mr. Chair, we believe that addressing the matter of housing on the supply side is important. We're going to continue to work with this five-point plan that's already bearing fruit and results for the people of this province, as we see some easing in the vacancy rates. I can tell the member opposite that Swift Current, a city he'll know well, has a vacancy rate of 7 per cent. You'd have some real concern about the impact of potential rent control in certain communities, in certain markets around, in terms of the long-term supply of housing.

So, Mr. Chairman, we're not going to be moving down that direction. We're going to continue with this plan that addresses supply. It is a comprehensive plan. It's bearing fruit. It's getting results here in the province of Saskatchewan. This is a long-standing issue left completely unattended, I would say, in the dying days of the previous administration. So yes, there is some catch-up. There is more work to be done, and we'll continue to get the work done. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, just based on answers we've received from written questions, I just wanted to indicate to the Premier that when it comes to social housing in the province, the waiting list for social housing — and this is dated in March of 2011 — the increase is 122 per cent. And in affordable housing, the wait increase is 99 per cent. The worst case is Estevan and Swift Current, according to the answer to written questions to your government. Senior housing, the wait-list has increased by 48 per cent. Again the worst case is Swift Current where it's 15 months. La Ronge, nine months. And these are not my answers or my research; this is research of your government.

And so these are hard numbers to spin to the public that things

are getting much better. And the fact of the matter is that when you travel the province and talk to families in communities across the piece, they're finding a very, very difficult time, if they can find housing, to afford it. And in many cases, they simply can't find affordable housing. And eventually if it's not . . . [inaudible] . . . in a fairly quick hurry, it will start diminishing the opportunities for economic development right across the province.

And it's not rocket science. Solving housing programs, people are doing it all over the world. In every province and Saskatchewan has had cycles of boom and need for housing. And the question is, why is this government baffled as to how to solve a housing problem? The answer is, you build more affordable housing. And if you've got a lack of money, take a little bit more from the Potash Corporation so we can do a big housing program to build thousands of houses, affordable houses in the province, and solve the problem.

But for the minister to have conferences and flusters of papers and studies and analysis and then indicate that everything is okay when in fact, by your own answers to questions last month . . . This is last month. This is after being in government almost four years. Here's what your answer is: social housing, the waiting list has increased by 122 per cent. The second answer is: affordable housing up 99 per cent. And seniors' housing, the wait time up by 48 per cent.

And again there are solutions that are quick at hand. And in this building construction season, in Swift Current for example or Estevan, we can solve this problem simply by putting together, quickly, housing programs. I don't think we need a lot more strategies and conferences and big think tanks. This is building houses. We've been doing it for generations. And believe me; the rent issue has got much worse, not because of you, but it just has got worse over the last four years.

Rent has been going up on average 10 per cent a year, 10 per cent a year. And in the units that I was referring to earlier where they're getting a 63 per cent increase on average, some of them 100 per cent, they have had 10 per cent three years ago, 10 per cent increase two years ago, 10 per cent one year ago, and now a 63 per cent. So this is a problem of huge proportion for those families, and it's not just one. There's a number of them across the province. I think this one was the highest, but there are many where it's going up 20 and 30 per cent.

And at that time, when asked about the situation, Mr. Chairman, the Premier said, and I quote:

I want to say this . . . The fact that the government has said we don't think rent control is the answer — that ought not to be a licence or interpreted by anyone in this province that now we have a licence to increase rents at what are an unacceptable level.

Referring to the situation, and also at that time called for extending the notice given to renters. And I just wondered, I think at that time, Mr. Premier, you called for a one-year notice to be given. And I just wondered whether that is in process, although I don't think that's going to solve the problem, and I don't think it is the answer. I think at that time you referred to . . . In the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] story, the

headline is “Notice of rent hikes could be extended . . .” and the Premier’s name. I just wonder whether that is in play at the present time, or should renters expect that to be announced in the next short while?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. That particular example the member highlights is obviously one that is unacceptable. Anybody hearing that story would understand that’s acceptable. In fact I understand from the Attorney General that we know anecdotally landlords have reached out to tenants that are affected by that because they understand that it’s unacceptable, and there’s opportunities for those people to avoid that kind of a rate hike.

I did, we did have some discussion with the media the day that issue was raised, and the reference that the member has just made was certainly in the context of we’re going to have a housing summit coming up shortly. Now it obviously has passed. And these matters, we’re going to be interested in hearing from the non-profit associations, from the community groups, and from the municipalities about some of these ideas — on time for notice, for example, or even just generally on rent control.

And what the minister has reported to the cabinet is that there was not a lot of interest on rent control, not just from municipalities. We know where the mayor of Saskatoon and the mayor of Regina, they’ve weighed in on this issue and said rent control is wrong for their cities, Mr. Chair. The mayors have said rent control is wrong for their cities. Now we heard from other municipalities, and a number of other community associations who reported to the minister at the summit that this was not the answer. And so the government is not alone in this regard. And it’s not real estate developers as sometimes the opposition likes to characterize as the ones who are opposing rent control. It’s municipal leaders. It’s those who are on the front line dealing with this issue.

And when the member for Eastview would’ve travelled around in 2007, when vacancy rates were lower and still came to the conclusion that rent controls were wrong, she would’ve met with the same community groups, the same municipal leaders who said to the government then, don’t do rent controls. The NDP chose not to do them. What’s changed since then? Well they were the government, duty bound to provide good public policy for the province of Saskatchewan. Now they’re the opposition, and I think now it’s more about politics than good public policy. And so they’ve completely reversed their position on rent control, one that they worked carefully and diligently on to come to in 2007, and now they have reversed the position — not born out of the efficacy of the policy, but born rather out of their political interests.

We are going to continue with the full spectrum plan that we have highlighted for housing in the province. I would just say this. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition said, well you know, why don’t we have, why don’t we have a plan in each municipality to deal with their current state and put up some housing units really quickly? Why wouldn’t we have that?

Well I can tell the hon. member this, Mr. Chair, that at the

housing summit, one of the conclusions the minister has reported, one of the bits of advice that we received from participants there was that — and one we responded to positively to, by the way — was that yes, we need to work with municipalities. We have been up till date. We will continue to do that to recognize that each municipal area requires a different solution and that we will move as quickly as we possibly can in government.

Now on the issue of social housing, we have a challenge in this province today. I don’t expect it’s new. I expect it faced — the previous government — I expect it faced members of . . . the ministers of Sask Housing in the previous government. Here’s the challenge, and I hope members are listening carefully. The challenge is, is that there’s no ongoing income testing for social housing in the province. There really isn’t a measure to achieve that.

And so the fact of the matter is this, that in social housing we’ll have a number of people living there who probably wouldn’t qualify. In fact, Mr. Chair, the wait-list that the member refers to, the wait-list for social housing — and by the way he did not point out the fact that in three of our largest . . . or three large centres, Moose Jaw, P.A. [Prince Albert], and Saskatoon — the wait-list has gone down in three out of four of our largest cities. But still, on that wait-list, it’s not necessarily a clear indicator of demand because often people on the wait-list themselves don’t qualify. They make too much money. Remember social housing is income tested so that those who need it the most get that housing, so that MLAs aren’t taking up the space of someone else or maybe other, or maybe other professionals who needed social housing for a time perhaps, but have advanced beyond the need for that and are now making more than what would be income tested, making enough that would disqualify them from social housing.

And so I’m asking members opposite, and I’m specifically asking the Leader of the Opposition, to work with the government because I think the minister responsible will be bringing forward a report to cabinet — I believe it’s in June is the current objective — to try to deal with this issue because we know there’s potential spaces that we can free up for people who need it that may be taken up right now by those who wouldn’t qualify with respect to the income levels that they’re now earning.

So here’s a step we can take. We need to do it in a way that’s constructive and that affords people the respect they deserve, because they’re in that social housing now. They obviously qualified at some point. We need to respect that fact. But we also need to deal very honestly and in a real way with the fact that . . . Well the member from P.A. is shaking his head. I think we need to deal honestly with the fact that some people in social housing wouldn’t qualify today. That housing is there for a reason. It’s there for low-income people. So let’s find out what. Let’s find out what’s happened. Let’s find out together how many are qualified.

Can we open up some more units for those who truly need it? Can we do it in a positive and constructive way that’s respectful of those people currently in social housing? I think we can, and I think we must because the housing challenge is real. And we’ve got to make sure that social housing is available for its

original intent, to help people who are income tested — that was the plan under the NDP — who actually qualify for that housing. We're going to do that work. We invite the opposition to support us in that work.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I really wonder and what most families in the province are wondering, why after four years in government we have all these wonderful ideas of how to solve the problem. They're saying, why didn't you start doing this when you were elected in dealing with high rent, lack of housing, and wait for the list to get at this incredible wait-list in the province for social housing or for seniors or for affordable housing?

But on the question, Mr. Premier, of the idea of extending the notice of rent to a year, was that a proposal that was taken to the conference for discussion? And if so, how did the discussion go? And can you get from your minister a report on whether or not that was an acceptable idea or you just brought that forward? Was it an item that you asked the minister to take to the conference, or where did it go? Or did it . . . Was it just a statement you made that day and then nothing has happened with it since because some people actually bought into the idea that at least it would give them an extra six months. That's something. And they actually read the report that you said you were thinking about doing it, and it's not clear to me that there was a decision made at the conference that said no, this is a bad idea, or they came to the conclusion, yes, it was a good idea.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. We didn't restrict the discussion at the housing summit. Anything was on the table from rent control, from new generation rent control in Manitoba, from the deadline or the notice requirements for people, for landlords wanting to increase the rent. I can report to the Assembly that it's certainly the view of officials and the minister that rent control was not being . . . it was not in demand as a result of the summit and neither were changes related to the notice offered up as recommendations from those attending the summit.

I also want to return it back to the wait-list, Mr. Chair, because the wait-list is not the only metric in terms of determining if there's a shortage. Remember that there are a number of reasons for households to apply for social and affordable housing. And wait-lists are an indication often of want, not necessarily need. This goes to my point earlier, that sometimes the wait-list is populated by individuals who, after getting to the top of the list, will find out they're not qualified because of the income testing that's a part of social housing — not new to our government, by the way, but a long-standing practice here in the province of Saskatchewan. And we think it's time to take a real look at the social housing issue that we have, the number of units we have.

[16:30]

Remember that we have 800 new units built since we took office. And the hon. member said, why are you only doing something about it right now? Mr. Chair, one of the earliest

things we did in government was the commission, the task force struck of two former MLAs — a former colleague of his, Mr. Pringle; a former colleague of mine, Mr. Merriman — who travelled the province and met with the municipal sector, met with CBOs [community-based organization], and made several recommendations with respect to housing.

The previous minister of Social Services, the current Minister of Social Services have been implementing much of what was recommended in that report. Moreover we've been building public units, Mr. Chair, for some time before the member's return to the province. We've been building new units, and we have 800 new units in operation — 1,100 in different phases of construction, Mr. Chair. We've moved to act, to index the shelter allowance for those who are most vulnerable in this province — something that they could have done and refused to do for a very, very long time, Mr. Chair.

We know this, that the vacancy rates today — and I repeat — while they are still too low, are higher than they were under the previous administration. The question isn't what took this government so long, because we began acting immediately. The question is why were they doing nothing in 2006-07, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Obviously the issue is the four-year period and the year we're looking at now, as to what the Premier and what his government is doing.

And the fact is that, at the conference held in Saskatoon, it's my understanding that the reason rent control wasn't discussed is the fee charged to individuals was \$150, and the people who wanted rent control were outside handing out leaflets and nobody would go talk to them. That's the truth of what happened with rent control discussion at the conference that the Premier paid for, is that the renters who can't afford their rent were excluded from the conference because of the fee charged to keep them out. So they took the next best option. I know the Queen City rental association or tenants' association, they were leafleting outside, outside of the conference, handing out, trying to lobby the government for rent control, not inside where they should have been speaking and making the case of why they wanted rent control.

Now you can pretend that it's not an issue of the public, but you can't do it by excluding them from a housing conference where they wanted to come to have a voice and to have a say, and especially not in 2011.

I think a much better way, even if you didn't agree with rent control, would be to get them in the room, talk to them, and convince them why rent control wouldn't work — not to exclude them by having a fee that people who are living near the poverty line or at the poverty line and can't afford their rent, to announce a big, fancy conference or hearing and then exclude the very people that the housing conference is supposed to protect. Now that's not fair. And what I'm hearing from many people who wanted to go to the conference, that they couldn't because they couldn't afford the \$150 per head to go in. So they took the next option and were handing out little leaflets that they printed up somewhere and trying to convince

those people going to the conference, they would hand them the pamphlet and say please read this and when you go inside to explain to the Premier's staff and the minister's staff who were there, and the people from housing with the best interest, that there is a problem and that they wanted rent control.

So when you say that at the conference nobody talked about rent control, it's likely that it's because the minister excluded them with the high fee. And if you want to hear from people who want rent control, again why don't we do something where we have a public forum? We could do it together and invite people who are living in rental units to come in free. We could buy coffee and let them come in and speak their mind. You could convince them they don't need rent control, and then we could have a discussion around that. But to pretend that you had a hearing where you heard from people and charged \$150 a head to get in, and then excluding the very people who can't afford their rent, how the heck would they be able to afford \$150 to go to a day's conference?

So my question to the Premier is, why don't we reinvent this conference and have it in the inner city in Saskatoon or Estevan or Swift Current where renters could come and have a say in whether they want rent control or not?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — You know, Mr. Chair, this is a good forum for debate, and I think it's been a good debate heretofore. I think we've had an honest exchange and there's honest differences. And so I'm going to assume that the hon. member is unaware of the facts of the housing summit when he would make the accusations that he just made. Because the hon. member will know — or should know, his housing critic should tell him if he hasn't — that non-profit groups were, their registration was paid for. Their . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well let's read the list. Well let's read the list.

Let's read the list: the River Bank Development in Prince Albert, the Northern Spruce Housing Corporation in Prince Albert, Lighthouse Supported Living in Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation. I wonder if the critic or the member, the Leader of the Opposition would agree that Quint Development Corporation is likely to represent the views of the inner city of Saskatoon. Their registration was waived. The Gabriel Housing . . . Well he nodded his head, so I assume he accepts that fact. Gabriel Housing Corporation, Regina; Silver Sage Housing Corporation in Regina; Cress Housing in Saskatoon; Namerind Housing in Regina; the Saskatoon Housing Coalition.

I assume they were going to be fairly direct with the minister, who by the way met with all of these community-based groups and discussed the housing issue, met with them for an hour and a half, and there was no consensus or recommendation on rent control. Carleton Housing in Lloydminster, Habitat for Humanity, KC Charities in Saskatoon, Carmichael Outreach in Regina.

And so now this member of the opposition and his critic want to tell the province of Saskatchewan about the exclusivity of the summit where the most active groups on the housing file in the inner city, in Prince Albert and Regina and Saskatoon are

invited and their registration is completely waived while private developers in municipal sector paid, Mr. Chair, and paid \$150. It's not, Mr. Speaker, it's not genuine. That's the bottom line.

And moreover, moreover the minister met with these groups for about an hour and a half, and there was no consensus on rent control. And, Mr. Chair, Mr. Chairman, I would say it's important if we're going to advance this debate that the member opposite, that all members of the House deal in fact, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier was about individual renters and he knows that. He knows that he's misrepresenting what I said, and he's very good at that. He does it all the time.

I was not talking about groups and organizations, and I don't know how many of them attended. I was talking about individual renters who wanted to go, and how many stakeholders. And also the renters who came here and stood on the front steps of the legislature and invited the minister to come and speak to them, and there was no one from the government who would go and speak to them. Now the question is, what are you afraid of? Why are you afraid of individual renters?

I never said that groups, organizations weren't invited. I didn't say that. I said individual renters had to pay \$150. And if it was free for the organizations, why wouldn't it be logical that if individual members who were renting wanted to go, they would be free as well? Why would you exclude them?

And so I want to say to the Premier, and I'm not being argumentative, I'm just saying why don't we want to listen to individual renters like Ann, who I referred to in question period who is seeing her rent go up by 63 per cent? Why haven't we got a forum where we could get individuals to come and present their own case as individuals in a human element and explain to us what it's like to rent and have the rent go up by 63 per cent when you're on a fixed income of \$1,200? Why not hear from individuals, unfiltered by organizations? What would be wrong with that?

What would be wrong with hearing from people like Ann who showed me her income of \$1,200 and every penny where she spent that money? She could be the Finance minister and get it better balanced than the present Finance minister. She knew exactly. And at the bottom of the line, she had spent her \$1,200 and had left over \$4.95, and her rent was going up 500 bucks.

And she would like to, and I'm sure there were many others who would like to come and present what it feels like and what it's like to be on a limited income so we understand. It's easy for us to talk about it or it's easy for organizations to talk about it. It's quite another thing if you're 85 years old and you'd lived in a place for over 20 years and you haven't moved, to get a notice that your rent's going up 63 per cent. And that's my question to the Premier.

And I'm not, for sure I'm not trying to mislead you, sir, on any issue around organizations getting into the conference free. My

question was why were renters excluded if they couldn't afford? And going back, you'll remember I said individuals who couldn't afford to pay their rent, why were they excluded? For sure, if I didn't explain it well to say individuals, I think by my explanation if you read *Hansard*, you know I was referring to individuals not organizations.

But again my question to you, sir, is why were individuals excluded because they would have been the best ones to hear from as to the impact of high rent?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair, the intimation now is that this same group that are affected by these very high rate hikes were not met with or listened to by the government. And the member opposite will know . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well fair enough then. The member's not saying that. I accept that.

But I want to tell him that both the Attorney General and the minister responsible met with that group and heard from them, exactly as the hon. member would want them to hear, in terms of how that did feel to get that rental notice and what options these people wanted explored for their very compelling case. The fact of the matter is, that meeting did occur.

The fact of the matter is, that two months prior to the housing summit, there was a consultation the minister engaged in. Twelve . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the member says that, the member now sort of shakes his head and said that's not what it's about. He's just asked about individuals being able to access the Minister of Social Services or my office or any member of the government side to make their case either in favour of rent control or to portray for the government their concerns on the housing issue, and I'm answering the question.

Two months before the housing summit, there was 12 consultations held. Three hundred and fifty people participated, Mr. Chair. Moreover I'm not aware of a single request for a meeting from an individual, whether she was . . . in any of her files where the minister has not made every effort to make those meetings happen. Fact of the matter is, we work very hard to make sure that's the case, imperfectly I'm sure, but we make every effort to make sure that's the case.

And prior to the housing summit, on the very issues the member's raising, the minister engaged in a public consultation — 12 meetings and 350 people. And then it culminated in a housing summit whereby the individual renter's plight was also represented, or wherein was also represented by community-based organizations that wished to attend. And their fee was completely waived.

I am very comfortable that we heard both from those organizations that represent those individuals, that the minister has heard from individual tenants who are facing challenges and other stakeholders with respect to the housing challenge, has met with them, and the meetings have occurred freely. And there's been an engagement, Mr. Chair. That is the track record of the government dating back to its very first housing consultation we struck in 2008 with Bob Pringle and Ted Merriman after years of neglect by the NDP of the housing issue, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, I accept the answer from the Premier. I don't agree with it. I think we do need a very different form of housing initiative, one that's rapid fire, urgent, and that we get a lot of things done this summer. I don't see that happening. I also think we need, in the interim, rent control. But I think we've explored this from enough angles, and I think we'll agree to disagree.

And if I could, Mr. Chairman, just notify the committee, I have one urgent call to make. And while I'm out for just a few moments, the Deputy Leader has some questions that she wants to ask. So if you don't mind, I will vacate, but thank the Premier for the answer.

[16:45]

The Chair: — I recognize the Deputy House Leader.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you. Thank you very much. Soon, soon, Mr. Chair.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I wanted to look to get some clarification from the Premier in some questions that had really come about because of estimates. One evening we had spent a fair bit of time and the Minister of Government Services had gone to great lengths to talk about office space standard that had been adopted by executive government in 2010. And I believe it had gone to 200 square feet per employee, per FTE [full-time equivalent], and that was now the current or new target utilization rate for ministries' overall space allocation for general office space in each location.

The minister also went on to talk about working with all ministries to review the current space allocations with other departments and that we seek out strategies and feasible opportunities to reduce space because my mandate is to reduce the footprint of government.

But then as we went on through discussions, the minister also revealed that there was a commitment, Government Services is committed to taking space in tower 3. So this is an as unyet built tower in downtown Regina. And at that time, it was about a month ago, Mr. Chairperson, and the minister said that while they were committed to taking the space for an extended period of time, they had no idea who would occupy the space. Does the Premier have any idea who will be moving into this prime office space in downtown Regina?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Chair, let me just say at the outset, I welcome the questions from the hon. member. Today on the skyline of the city of Regina is something we haven't seen for a very, very long time in the province. It's a construction crane. We've seen a number of them in the city of Saskatoon here recently, especially on the east side. There's a joke going around that city that the official bird of Saskatoon may well be the construction crane.

We hope that that's catching. We hope that we see a lot more construction in Regina and in centres across the province,

especially when, Mr. Chair, especially when the construction means that, yes there'll be government offices potentially located there, but that we would get upwards of 100 brand new corporate head office jobs thanks to Mosaic. That's the right kind of construction crane for the capital city of Regina.

Mr. Chairman, it's why . . . And I know that some of the MLAs on the opposite side, from Regina, were welcoming of the hon. member's question and criticism of this project, and that shocks me a little bit. This is something I thought there's certain things in politics that you welcome no matter what side of the House you sit on. When the NDP cut business taxes, that was a welcome thing, and we said so.

Here's a development, Mr. Chair, that's going to result in a brand new building in downtown, that is going to result in new head office jobs for the city of Regina and for the province of Saskatchewan. And it's happening at a very unique time in terms of the corporate vacancy rate in our capital city. The vacancy rate in Regina is less than 2 per cent. Roughly 70 per cent of government leases on an annual basis come due in downtown Regina. There are always leases coming due, and of course if the vacancy rate is low — and we've just had the housing discussion — if the vacancy rate is low, guess what? Rents are moving up.

Government, if it's to be responsible even as it's reducing its footprint, needs to make sure that it's a force for good in increasing the supply of square footage out there so that the taxpayers aren't paying ever increasing rates of rent. So this particular project is the nexus of a couple of important things. One, the attraction of a head office to the capital city — very important for Mosaic. Two, a brand new development in downtown Regina — a beautiful development, I would say, based on what I've seen. That's very important. And three, some easing in terms of the pressure on government for costs of space even as we reduce the size of government 15 per cent over four years. And by the way, I want to report to the House, and thanks to our public service, we're on track to achieve that objective.

The bottom line is this: this city's growing. There's a demand for office space in the city of Regina. This particular building will accommodate some of that growth. It's going to be some years out. We know leases are coming due all the time. And so while we can't say this ministry, that ministry, and this ministry in three or four years will move into that building, we know there will be a demand because we see a 70 per cent turnover rate year over year in some cases, Mr. Chair. There will be a demand. And in the meantime, we've got a brand new head office, something I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Regina MLAs will want to welcome. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't even go close to answering the question. And it's not that we're being critical of the project or disappointed that a tower is going up in downtown Regina. It's good for the city of Regina. It's good for the province of Saskatchewan. But, Mr. Speaker, when we have had the Premier ever since the election . . . And I would advise

him maybe reread your platform from the last election campaign when you made the commitment that you will provide Saskatchewan people with more transparency and accountability than any previous government. That's what we're asking for.

We're asking to understand why you are looking to lease 50 to 60,000 square feet of space in downtown Regina. For whom is this space required? Who is going to be moving into this prime location? What is the need?

First when the minister does a fairly lengthy discussion and explanation in estimates for Government Services, talking about the whole space standard changes that have been made, and she went on to say utilization of the standard has saved the government over 36,000 square feet of office space with various moves in 2010-11. So you're talking about saving 36,000 square feet of space that no longer — I would assume by the answer — has to be rented by the Government of Saskatchewan to accommodate space because you have rearranged and better utilized space.

Then there was another lengthy discussion about lean processes. And I realize that lean talks about the processes you use. But let's be honest here. Lean also means that as you streamline your processes and save government money and provide better service to the people of Saskatchewan, it naturally means you will be eliminating some jobs and streamlining processes. That's part and parcel of it, Mr. Speaker.

And then we have a commitment from this government that they will reduce the civil service 4 per cent for each of the four years they are government — 16 per cent reduction in the civil service, a reduction in space standard requirements for government operations, and then we're turning around and we are leasing . . . Well no, we have committed, we have committed to leasing 50 to 60,000 square feet of new space.

Now it's interesting the answer that we got. So what I asked is, is Government Services leasing any space in the new tower or negotiating for any other government department or agency to be in the new office tower in downtown Regina? And the answer that we received is, Government Services is committed to taking some space in tower 3. They are committed. So that commitment's already been made.

They're in the process of negotiating a lease at this point in time. So now Government Services usually does the negotiations for office space. They are the ones that arranges space, that moves government departments to appropriate space, either in government-owned buildings or through leases. But the person from Government Services doesn't say, we're in the process of negotiating space; he says, they're in the process of negotiating a lease at this point in time.

So do you know, I don't want to be a conspiracy theory here, but you almost wonder if the negotiations is going on through Executive Council. Was this commitment to space for a reduced government footprint, was this commitment to 50 or 60,000 square feet in downtown Regina, was that a commitment the Premier made to guarantee the go-ahead of this officer tower?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, I need to correct something I said in my earlier answer. I had the correct number but in the wrong context. But it's an important fact nonetheless. In Regina, about 70 per cent of government's leased office space is located in the downtown. Typically 50 to 100,000 square feet of leased office space expires every year.

So let's walk through this then, Mr. Chair. You've got that many leases, that much lease space expiring, between 50 and 100,000 every year, in a market that's very tight, in a market where the vacancy rate is 2 per cent. And so therefore, what's happening to rent? It's going up. And so in that kind of a market, government, even though we are reducing the footprint and we are on target to reduce the footprint, we're not reducing the footprint to accommodate 50 to 100,000 less square feet every year. We're still going to need some space. And we still need to be a force for good in increasing the supply in the market. That case was presented to the government by Government Services, that we had a challenge with respect to office space.

So the question then is, can we address that issue? Can we address the need for a long-term supply and easing of the rent costs the taxpayers are responsible for, and attract something new to the city and attract a head office, in this case, the Canadian headquarters for Mosaic corporation? Could all of that be possible in one particular initiative? The answer was, yes, it could. The government will take less than 30 per cent of the space in this building. Not with new government, but with existing government, even trimming down at the level the hon. member has correctly characterized, we're going to need that space as that building opens up in 2012. And in the bargain, the developer's going to take a number of, a lot of the space. And Mosaic is moving upwards of 100 brand new people to the city — new jobs, new corporate head office jobs, to our capital city and to the province of Saskatchewan.

So we were able to meet a number of needs here. One, that we want to see the province grow. We don't want to just mine potash; we want to see a bigger corporate presence, bigger corporate offices from potash. And three, the government itself is going to need to give itself some breathing space in the mid-, in the long term with respect to demands for office space. I repeat again, typically in a year, 50 to 100,000 square feet of government lease expires in the capital city. That is going to . . . That is much more than reducing the size of government by 4 per cent, I can tell you that, Mr. Chair. Moreover, there are pressures on rents right now because of a 2 per cent, less than 2 per cent vacancy rate.

So here we have prudent policy on the part of government to make sure it eases the supply question for itself and lowers costs to taxpayers. And in the bargain, attract a brand new head office to the province of Saskatchewan. And now we have a crane in downtown Regina for the first time in a very long time.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Chair, this is an awful lot of investment, and a big commitment of taxpayers' funds to have a crane in downtown Regina. And when the Premier made the commitment to transparency and accountability, that's what

we're asking for.

He talks about a head office moving to downtown Regina. It's wonderful, Mr. Speaker, but he should add into that we are also giving 100,000 per job tax credit or tax incentive for each of those jobs that move into downtown Regina.

Mr. Speaker, he was at the sod-turning for this new project in downtown Regina, but I can't find anywhere in any of the announcements that the Premier made this statement, "I look forward to the day the Government of Saskatchewan is a major tenant in this building."

Even looking at the new space standard that the minister explained in estimates that evening of 200 square feet per person, per FTE, as the space requirement, the new standard by the Government of Saskatchewan, we're looking at 50 to 60,000 square feet. We're talking about 300-plus people moving into the downtown office tower. I would say that makes us a bigger tenant than Mosaic who the Premier has talked about quite, quite a bit, talking about Mosaic's head office. Well I think the Government of Saskatchewan is going to have a bigger presence in that building than anyone else. So to have a crane in downtown Regina is wonderful, but we are paying tax incentives for the head office jobs that are moving there and we are also leasing a major portion of this new office tower.

Again I will say to the Premier, this is an awful long commitment of a 20-year lease to this space that we're not sure what it's for and just . . . I hope he's not just trying to drive down the lease costs in downtown Regina, because he talked about having new space, government moving. There's also a tight rental market. I hope he's not just trying to open up the rental market and investing in a new building, but we don't really know because we're still waiting for some transparency and accountability by this Premier.

[17:00]

Mr. Speaker, now I can see the Premier, he's over there chuckling, having a great time. But the fact of the matter, the province of Saskatchewan has got tied into these long-term deals before. And the Government of Saskatchewan has been tied into 20-year lease agreements that have been extremely expensive for the taxpayers. We have paid over and over and over again for numerous projects that were long-term agreements like this and there is some uncomfortableness with the Premier tying taxpayers of Saskatchewan into a 20-year, long-term lease for property and space that he doesn't even know what it's for.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a real estate agent, but I would say if a client came to me and said, well I need 40,000 square feet, I would like these attributes kind of attached to the space. Then I would go looking for the space. I don't say, well look at this, I've got 40 or 50 or 60,000 square feet, now gee I'm going to lease it. I'm going to lease it for 20 years, but what am I going to put in it? Oh well, we'll find something. I mean there's enough stuff that moves around. We'll find something.

Nobody does business that way, Mr. Chair. We all know it. So what we're looking for is some accountability on behalf of the Premier and transparency which he committed to the people of

this province. He is reducing the size standards for office space in government. He is reducing the size of the civil service, and he is renting more space. Please tell us why.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. We'll try one more time. We're going to, at the end of the day, the government will lease about 60,000 square feet in this building when it's completed — 2012. Remember this now. This is a very important fact for the hon. member and answers her question I hope, I think.

There is approximately 475,000 square feet of leased space coming due between 2012 and 2014. Mr. Chair, we are going to need much more than the . . . Assuming that we move, which is an option for government to move, the member will note — she used to be a minister of Government Services — assuming these offices may relocate, there would be a much greater demand than the 60,000 feet available in this particular tower. We know on a per employee basis the cost for this particular space, which will be needed, is lower in this particular facility the way it will be configured than in other facilities. We know the vacancy rate in Regina for corporate space is 2 per cent.

It's very interesting what she said here, Mr. Chair, a minute ago. She said, well but if the government takes action, like we are, to avail itself of more options, 60,000 feet even though we're going to need a half a million square feet in the next number of years, and she says if the government does that — takes actions to make sure there's some options so that taxpayers aren't paying ever and ever higher increasing office rents — she says, she intimates, well that wouldn't be any good because we'll be driving down rents in the city of Regina with these 60,000 feet.

Now we're going to increase supply and drive down rents in the city of Regina, maybe wreck the market. I don't know. It hearkens back to the member for Saskatoon, the Labour critic for the opposition, who made the same case about housing. His big criticism about our housing plan was it's going to result in too many houses and that might affect, that might affect price, Mr. Chair.

Well first of all, if there's a housing shortage, it's very likely that it would take a lot of houses for that to happen. But it is precisely the point that we need supply options, not just in housing, but with respect to corporate offices for the city of Regina and for the government. I can assure the member this. This space is going to be needed. This space is going to be needed, and much more space will be needed if we choose to seek other options.

The fact of the matter is that the economy of Regina is growing not because the government is growing, because we're getting smaller, Mr. Chair, and hopefully more efficient. The city of Regina is growing. The economy is growing here because of the private sector. That's driving a demand for corporate office space. We know that puts pressure on government. We've seen this project not only as leverage for government to provide competitively cost office space for our government offices as they're required, even as we shrink government, but also to attract a head office.

We think it is a good project for the city of Regina. We think it's a good project for the province of Saskatchewan. The space the government will be taking in the building is much, much less than the space, than the leases that will be coming due over the same period of time.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I guess that's the Premier's version of being transparent and accountable. He says take my word for it; it will be less. But what struck me when the Premier was making his pitch talking about the markets in Regina and the lease rates and what will come, what leases will run out or be up this year for the Government of Saskatchewan, you know, there are so many questions that come up. Are you automatically going to move? What are your costs of moving? Does that space accommodate what you're looking for? Obviously the Premier has some inkling of what's going in there.

But I'm struck by the feel that the Premier here is picking winners and losers, supporting a head office move by committing taxpayers' dollars to that building for an extended period of time, 20-year lease. And I'll tell you. I've seen some of these 20-year leases — they're pretty ironclad — that were signed by the former Conservative government that the Premier actually was mentored by the former premier, Grant Devine. And he can shake his head all he likes, but I mean we've all seen many familiar faces in this building. And there are numerous people that get very uncomfortable over some of the things that are going on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all we have to look at . . . Now the Minister of Health, the Minister of Health just reminded me, Mr. Speaker, here we have the whole deal with Amicus, and that opens up . . . Here we have an under-the-table agreement signed out of the Premier's office. No details are being released. The facility was under construction before the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority even approved the deal. You know, and I mean it raises questions. That's taxpayers' dollars. Well the Premier's chuckling over there. Well I'm glad he is because taxpayers don't think it's funny, Mr. Chair.

And all we have to look at is one other: Parkridge in Saskatoon. Here's a facility that was leased by the former Conservative government — another one of these long-term deals, Mr. Speaker — 1.2 to 1.4 million paid in rent every year for twenty-three and a half years, almost 24 years. Renovations would have been done by the health authority, Mr. Speaker. Then we end up buying this facility back, selling it to the regional health authority. The facility needs nineteen and a half million dollars in renovations. And we are well up over \$60 million. Some estimate that the cost for this building are closer to 80 over this time period.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier stands and says trust me, this is going to be a more reasonable rent than we're paying in other places around Regina, well, do you know, there's got to be a way to put some of the figures on the table so the taxpayers of this province who are going to be on the hook for 20 years will have some comfort that yes, this is the best deal for the Government of Saskatchewan and for the taxpayers of this

province.

That's who we want the transparency and accountability for. I'm sure that's why the Premier made the commitment in his campaign. We're struggling to see it though, Mr. Speaker, and we're almost running into the next campaign, almost in the next campaign, and we are still waiting for some transparency and accountability to be shown on a number of these files. It's raised lots of questions and people are asking us, can't you get the answers? Well the Premier won't give them. He's put the lid on these deals, and it looks like we're going down the same path that we went in the '80s.

Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the member from Wood River is hollering SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company]. Do you know, we always know when the government and the Sask Party is getting a little anxious because they start hollering SPUDCO. SPUDCO was reviewed in this legislature and it was scrutinized, Mr. Speaker, and what we need is some scrutiny on some these. Transparency was good then, Mr. Chair, and what we are looking for is transparency on this deal and accountability that the Premier promised to taxpayers of this province.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair, the member has raised a number of different issues getting to her question which still relates to the building. I'll just repeat, Mr. Chair, that it was going to need upwards of 470 to 500,000 square feet of office space over the next number of years. Our commitment in this building is to take less than 30 per cent of the building. There's 60,000 feet. Mr. Chair, it'll accommodate our plan to reduce the size of government.

It also happened to leverage a brand new building for the city of Regina and a brand new head office. And I guess we could talk about head offices in Regina and how governments can impact them negatively and positively. Witness the Wascana oil or the CanOxy offices that we used to have in Regina but were really ripped from the city as a result of the efforts of the Opposition Leader, lobbying his NDP friends and then having the deal done by the NDP government and all of those former SaskOil jobs subsequently being taken away to Calgary.

We could talk about that, Mr. Chair. We have a different view for the city. We believe we had to have more office, head offices in this province, that we ought not to just pump the oil and mine the potash, but that we all should, we should be attracting new corporate, new corporate head offices to our cities. And, Mr. Chair, we're seeing some progress. This particular building is an example of that.

In fact in the royalty changes that we have done and the review we've done, Mr. Chair, it's no secret that we actually improved the potash tax structure in the province so that we weren't just providing an incentive for new production workers, new miners, but also that we'd provide an incentive if people would bring their corporate officers to our city and that helped.

The hon. member also depicted tax incentives as somehow directed by the Government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Chair. Other than those royalty changes, that's just not true. She'd done it

once in question period as well. There are local tax incentives, but they're local. The city of Regina feels pretty strongly about the project. The city of Regina likes the new jobs in the project. The city of Regina likes the added assessment and likes what it'll do to downtown, and they have supported it, not just in word, Mr. Chair, but they've extended incentives as well, I believe, I believe local tax incentives.

The hon. member raises Parkridge. Well first of all let me back up. The hon. member decries 25-year deals, leases. Well her government did a 20-year deal for the provincial office building in Meadow Lake, and her government did a 15-year deal for the J.A. Pepper Building in Weyburn. There's a list here. I guess we can go down the list. The fact of the matter is leases that long have happened under the NDP. She tried to skip a decade — and some people, others tried to skip that decade as well — but she tried to skip it and reference only one particular decade. The fact of the matter is again the NDP's words are one thing, but their actions and their record say something else.

With respect to Parkridge, with respect to Parkridge, that was a 25-year deal. Sixteen years of those 25 years, the NDP were in office. Every five years of that lease there was an option for government to purchase the facility, Mr. Chair. They never exercised that option. Moreover if the deal, which they know the details of because they were the government, if the deal was not right for the province of Saskatchewan, not right for health care in the province of Saskatchewan, they had another option. They could have just through vehicle of this legislature — it would have been clumsy perhaps — but they could have come into this legislature and by instrument of this place, they could simply break the contract.

Well, well, well the Leader of the Opposition says I guess you shouldn't do . . . that we shouldn't do that. And that is our position generally speaking. But it hasn't always been his position because when he took office in 1991 as a member of the cabinet, one of their first orders of business was to do what? To rip up the GRIP [gross revenue insurance program] agreement with Saskatchewan farmers. That's what they did.

Now, now, well now the member is chuckling. Now the member that asked the questions, the deputy leader is chuckling. Her question was on Parkridge, or her criticism on Parkridge was its term and this was a bad deal. They were in office for 16 years of it. They were more than happy to rip up GRIP for farmers, that legally binding agreement. Why didn't they come into this legislature, if that Parkridge deal was terrible, and rip up that agreement as well? That's a question the hon. member may want to answer when next she has the opportunity.

[17:15]

Mr. Chair, long-term leases have been a fact of the matter in this province, a fact of business in this province on the part of Government Services and SPM [Saskatchewan Property Management] before it and SPMC [Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation] before that, under their government, under our government. In our case, there is less than 30 per cent of this building to be used by government spaces over the years. We know that's much less than what will be required even on the part of a government that's shrinking in size and hopefully

getting more efficient.

And, Mr. Chair, I repeat again, that as a result of this agreement, we have a brand new Canadian headquarters for Mosaic and a brand new development in downtown Regina. We're happy to work with the city of Regina to see its continued growth and prospect, as we are with the rest of the province. We are proud of our capital city, and we want to continue to work with the mayor and council, the business people in Regina to add new jobs and create new buildings and developments in the downtown.

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

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length about the Premier's comments, but there's a little thing having to do with the province being bankrupt after the last Conservative government. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier, Mr. Chair, the Premier will be well aware of that. And while he smiles, there are many that are worried about us heading down that same path.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I turn the questioning over . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. I'm having a hard time hearing the member that's placing the question. I would ask that the Assembly come to order. I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. Just one quick question, just for clarification, right at the beginning of the Premier's comments, he said this investment and the . . . I would assume by the long-term lease. And I should never assume anything, Mr. Speaker, but I will make that assumption. He said that by this investment by government, it secured a head office in downtown Regina. Was the Government of Saskatchewan the first investor in this project?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, to the Premier. I started out my comments by talking about a number of people in the province I've talked to who are beginning to feel that the gap between rich and poor in this province, or even between rich and working people, is widening too fast. And it's not what they think the Saskatchewan way or their Saskatchewan is all about, where you have a few extremely rich people and then the rest of the community who are in the working capacity slipping slowly but surely, because their wages are being restricted, and seniors who are on very restricted pension plans who feel they can't make ends meet.

And I wanted to talk to the Premier or ask the Premier a few questions about the strategy when it comes to paying for health care workers, that is, health care workers told to lower their expectation, that a 1.5 per cent per year but CEOs rewarded with 20, 30, 40, up to 60 per cent increases.

And I wonder if the Premier gets any sense from people, when he's talking to families around the province — this gap between those who have a lot of money and people who are doing the heavy lifting and doing the day-to-day work, whether it's women in home care or whether it's people who are doing the teaching of our children in our schools — that there is a difference in the way we compensate working people. Those who are at high incomes, political staff, get fairly huge increases, and then the real working people are very much restricted and told to lower their expectation.

And there is a double standard when it comes to rewarding the people who do the work. And I'm not arguing that CEOs don't work; they do. I would argue with some of the decisions they make. But why is it that a CEO in the health region would need a 20 to 60 per cent increase and the home care worker deserves only 1.5 per cent? What is the plan behind that?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. While I'll deal more with the specifics of the member's questions here in a moment, I do want to talk just generally about affordability issues and specifically, I guess, one element of affordability in the province of Saskatchewan for families, and that's the area of taxation.

Mr. Chairman, I'm proud to report to this Assembly that since forming government only three and a half years ago, the Saskatchewan Party government has cut taxes 13 times. And the tax cuts have been meaningful income tax cuts that raised the personal and spousal exemption by 1,000 and child exemption by 500, education property tax cuts, very meaningful tax cuts for agricultural producers but also for those who own property in our cities, Mr. Chair. There's a list of 13 tax cuts.

Because we believe, Mr. Chairman, that while government needs to be there for those who are most vulnerable and while we need a fair wage strategy for the public sector — and more on that in a moment — the best way to ensure that we are dealing in the long term, in the most meaningful way with affordability issues and the question of are people sharing in the prosperity is to leave more money in people's pockets. And that is very different from the strategy of the NDP. When the hon. member was in government, we found 17 tax hikes that he was a part of, Mr. Chair. Compare that to the 13 in the three and a half years since we have formed the government.

We believe that you've got to begin at that point if you're government. That's the most direct impact you can have, other than those who are vulnerable which you can obviously have an important impact through social programs, but for the people of the province the greatest impact their governments can have in terms of affordability, in terms of the amount of money they're left with, is to take less from them in taxes while not requiring them to do with less in terms of government service. That's been our objective, Mr. Chairman. We'll have a debate about that, but I think we've had some success.

With respect to the member's question, I can say that he's talking about the managers of our health care system, the out-of-scope people. Mr. Chair, since we took office three and a half years ago, the Minister of Health confirms that

management has not received an increase. And moreover that even after the increases that he has been highlighting in question period, and the Health critic as well, even after those increases are put into effect, our managers are being paid 65 per cent of the Western average. Now, of the western average.

Now, Mr. Chair, this is an important point because just as we need to make sure we're competing for the very best front-line health care workers, we need to be able to compete with appropriate public sector wages in all areas including in health care management. Right now we have under way in this province, a nation-leading lean process initiated by the deputy minister, a former CEO of the health region, and the Minister of Health to bring about major efficiencies and better patient care through lean techniques. We rely on management and front-line workers, but we rely on a complete team to implement those.

And, Mr. Chair, we need to be competitive in terms of what we are paying all public employees in the province of Saskatchewan. In the case of managers — and you can point to a 20 per cent increase here; a higher percentage, 60 per cent increase in one particular area — remember, Mr. Chair, that on average even after the increases, we're only paying our health care managers at 65 per cent of what other Western provinces are paying. We're still going to have a hard time attracting and competing with those jurisdictions that are hiring health care managers.

Moreover, Mr. Chair, I would say that when we have settled . . . and we've settled with thousands of health care workers, and the ratification numbers have come in very high — 90 per cent-plus. We've settled with health care workers at a point, Mr. Chair, where they are at over 90 per cent of the average of Western Canada. In other words, they're very close to 100 per cent of the average of across Western Canada. So clearly we need to do more work in that regard. But some of them, Mr. Chair, are getting paid 110, 150 per cent, after the contract settlements, of the average of Western Canada.

So we're actually more competitive in terms of competing with the West, for those front-line workers than we are even after the increases for out-of-scope. I readily admit that the numbers don't stand out for people — a 20 per cent rate hike for somebody or a 60 per cent rate hike for someone else . . . And the critic for Health is chirping from her seat. But I hope she recognizes, I hope in a lucid moment she'd recognize that we need to be competitive. And even after these increases, we're only paying them at 65 per cent of the average of other western provinces.

Now, Mr. Chair, I think we have struck a reasonable human resource policy in the health sector. We have settled contracts, contract after contract. We're very hopeful we're going to make some more progress on an outstanding contract, Mr. Chair. And all the while we've implemented some new innovations, some lean techniques in health care by that management and by front-line workers that has served the province very well, and served the health care system very well.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, the exact point that I was

making, the Premier says that yes, in fact the CEOs of the health regions are getting huge increases. Increases like, February, the CEO of Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region got a \$71,000 increase. That's at the same time as 80 per cent of the staff in some sectors that are women are being told a 1 per cent increase or 1.5 per cent increase is good enough. And in terms of fairness, the people who are getting the 1.5 feel that they aren't part of the booming economy. Because they say, if it is in fact booming and some people get a \$71,000 increase, why am I restricted to a 2 or \$3,000 increase? And I think that's a legitimate question.

The health region in Saskatoon, March of this year, received a \$100,000 wage increase. April of this year, the CEO in the P.A. Health Region got a 60 per cent increase — 60, six, zero per cent increase. That would take a home care worker 50 years of increases at the present rate of increase to get a 60 per cent increase. It's not that they don't deserve to be paid, but how in the world can you explain one member of the health team, home care worker, getting a 1.5 per cent increase and the CEO getting 60 per cent? And the health care worker who's getting the 1.5 per cent saying, look, even if you now froze the increase for the CEO for 50 years, I would just catch up after, I mean that's longer than most people's career could ever be. And it's just not fair. And these women who work in health care doing the heavy lifting, I don't think they expect 60 per cent increase. But when other people are getting 60 per cent increase, they really ask the question, am I being respected for the work I do every day?

And I know other members of our caucus are getting calls from people who want to know why the increase. And I'm sure in truth your own backbenchers are getting calls from people who say, look in Prince Albert, why is it that the CEO gets 60 per cent increase? And I'm not blaming the CEO. Good for them if they can talk their way through the Minister of Health and get a 60 per cent increase. I don't blame them for taking the money. But the question is, when you say that if you didn't give them the 60 per cent increase they would just leave, that's like saying if you don't give all the profits to the potash companies they're going to leave. If you take more than a nickel on a dollar from the potash companies, they're going to pack their bags and leave, that's what they said. That's when the profits were 1.8 billion for the Potash Corporation. This year the gross profits are going to be \$3 billion. It'll be less than a nickel on a dollar because our take remains the same.

And so what we're seeing in the province is those who have a lot of money getting a lot more money, and those who are on a restricted income being told to lower their expectation. And I say to the Premier again, let's use the example of the CEO in Prince Albert. Where in the world would we have come up with the idea that you had to keep giving increases and an increase at the rate of 60 per cent in order to keep this person in the position? And this is what bargaining is all about. You bargain very tough with health care workers. I understand that. But why isn't the same standard of bargaining applied to the CEOs of health regions?

[17:30]

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair, by the facts, more stringent requirements are made of health care managers in the province by the health regions. And I repeat the facts. The facts are this: that even after the increases that the member has highlighted just now are implemented, we pay our health care managers 35 per cent less than what the average is paid in other Western provinces — managers. Managers.

Well he shakes his head. That's the fact. That's the fact. And so we've seen some large increases. But even after those large increases, even after those large increases, our managers are in the 65th percentile of the average of those being paid in other Western provinces. That means we're paying them 35 per cent less. In the case of health care workers with whom we've settled, they're in the 90th percentile in many respects, and some of them are over 100 per cent, thank goodness. We're paying them more than get paid in other provinces in Western Canada. So we're very competitive.

So more stringency has been applied by the health regions to management in terms of what we pay compared to other jurisdictions. And that's what we have to compare it to, Mr. Chair, because we need to attract them from other places. More stringency is applied. More scrutiny, I would say, is applied and has been applied by regions to the managers when you look at the actual fact of the matter. But it's easy in opposition to say, well you got a 20 per rate hike here and a 60 per cent hike here, and this guy gets \$70,000. That argument is, you know, a little bit tenuous. You could make the same case. You could have a CEO of an oil company get a \$70,000 raise, and it might mean a relatively small percentage versus the same percentage increase for the guy in the pumpjack.

I mean, Mr. Chair, it's about politics, this is. The truth of the matter is this: on average, after the increases, the salary increases that the hon. member is decrying are in place, after that, we pay our managers on average 35 per cent less than their counterparts in other Western jurisdictions. We pay our health care front-line workers much higher than that, close to 100 per cent for health care workers of the average of other Western provinces, in some case higher. And, Mr. Chair, by the way, that's an approach we've used to bargaining.

Under the NDP, they had this old, sort of the old, you know, socialist philosophy of everybody gets the same rate hike. That was their public sector mandates. It didn't matter if we were competitive with other jurisdictions. It's one, one, and one or two, two, and two, and it's for everybody.

Mr. Chair, we've taken a decidedly different approach to it. We've realized in the province, and we did so with nurses, that that kind of across-the-board solution for everybody doesn't necessarily work if you're not successfully competing with other jurisdictions for those health care professionals. So we have said as a result that our public sector bargaining mandate needs to be a bit more flexible, needs to be a bit fleet of foot, needs to understand that we'll have to compete with Alberta and BC and Manitoba and Ontario for those health care workers if we want them to come back to the province.

We campaigned on 800 new nurses in the province, something the NDP, the current member for North Battleford, said was impossible. Or at least he said, he would never set goals

because he would probably never achieve them. How do you get those 800 nurses if you're not offering them competitive wages with other jurisdictions?

So we've said, our government has said, these across-the-board mandates don't work in business. They don't work for the non-government sector. Why would they work in government where we need to be competitive for these human resources? We're not as competitive for managers right now, even after the increases. We're not as competitive. We're getting closer on front-line workers. It's the right ratio.

But the member's going to point to a number of different examples of this increase or that increase because it's good politics. The fact is, 35 per cent on average is the amount of money we pay, is the discount. In other words, we pay our health care workers on average 35 per cent less than other Western jurisdictions even after these increases are in effect.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I may have misheard the Premier, and if I did I apologize. But I think he said in an earlier statement that the CEOs hadn't received any increases, and I just want to refer to *The StarPhoenix* story of March 11th and quote about the CEO of the Saskatoon Health Region. When Davies took over the Saskatoon Health Region CEO in June of 2005, she was paid \$183,000 for her first year. In 2006-07, the salary range for the job was between 228 and 296. In 2009-10 she was at the top of the range and paid 312,000. And now this year, the wage goes to 400,000. That's an increase over four years from 183,000 to 400,000. And the Premier says still that's not enough. Still that's not enough. Health care workers over that same period of time would have seen a few thousand dollars in their pay package. Here we have an individual who's received about \$220,000 increase over a four-year period.

Now I wanted to ask the Premier: were all CEOs going up at the same rate during that period? Or was your earlier comment, that they hadn't received a rate increase, accurate? Which of the two is it?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair, I was speaking about a market adjustment, a significant market adjustment for managers. Mr. Chair, obviously there's going to be COLA [cost-of-living adjustment] increases for managers inside of government. In fact inside of government, in fact there's going to be adjustments as well when contracts are settled. Out-of-scope managers are also going to receive a similar increase. But it's my information that market adjustments, in the way that other jurisdictions have been making sure that they're retaining and attracting managers, has not occurred in the province for the last three years. It has occurred now, and that has led to this debate and these questions from the opposition.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Again, Mr. Speaker, the Premier tries to cover over the massive increase of CEOs over the last four

years since the government has started to put these increases in place. And I'm not arguing that they don't deserve to be paid or in fact that they shouldn't be paid properly. My only point is that usually when you're doing these kinds of increases, they're done, as I said, to keep people in the province.

And I wanted to ask the Premier, over the last 12 months, how many CEOs — the last 12 months before the increase — how many CEOs, health region CEOs had left because they were going to other parts of Canada or leaving to take better jobs in other parts of Canada? How many would have left?

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. Well again I want to point out to the members of the committee that we have a situation in the province where we're not yet competitive, even after these increases for management in health care. We're not yet competitive with other jurisdictions. We had a great CEO in the Cypress Hills health region — the current CEO is also doing a very good job — but a very effective CEO who came to our province from Newfoundland. And, you know, notwithstanding the fact there's a great team there today, I'm sure even that team would recognize it would be sure nice if we still had the previous CEO. The fact of the matter is we couldn't compete with the wages. The region couldn't compete with the wages he could get for health care management in Ontario.

I can tell you as well, Mr. Chair, and to the members of the committee, that a number of health regions currently with vacancies for financial officers can't fill them; they're having trouble filling them. The critic just discounts that point. This is the information that our health regions are reporting. There are financial officers that are required in the health region. And the fact of the matter is we're not as competitive with respect to wages for those financial officers as they can get in the private sector, including Regina Qu'Appelle. But I guess, you know, it shouldn't shock us that the member may not be accurate, that the Health critic isn't accurate in what she's saying from her seat. That wouldn't surprise anybody in this House given what we've seen from her over the last number of years.

But the point is this, that there are vacancies with respect to management in the province of Saskatchewan in health care, in health regions, and we're receiving reports that it's difficult to recruit people if you're not competitive with the private sector in our province or with other health regions in other jurisdictions. That's what we're saying. In the case of Jim Hornell, who was the CEO I mentioned in Cypress Hills, again he was doing an excellent job in that particular health region, and we simply couldn't compete with the offer he's getting from Ontario.

So I understand and I was the Opposition Leader for some time and sat on the opposition benches, so I understand that this is pretty good politics. Someone gets a \$70,000 raise. Some other manager gets a 60 per cent raise after there has not been a market adjustment for some period of time. But again the fact is this. Again the fact is this. To the member and to all members of the committee, we're still paying our managers on average significantly less than other Western jurisdictions even after these increases. So I guess I don't blame the member for wanting to make a little politics of this. I understand that.

The facts, though, still indicate to us that we need to be more competitive with respect to wages for the public service of this province, for out-of-scope, for in-scope as well. We've made a lot of progress on the front line in terms of health workers. But there's more work to be done.

And notwithstanding the fact that this is good fodder for the opposition, what this government has done, what the health regions are doing is good public policy in health care to make sure we have the right complement of management and front-line workers. Again with more work to be done, we're making significant progress in that regard, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — But this is part of the issue because what many families are saying is that the health care delivery system isn't getting better. That's the problem. We're paying our managers, especially the CEOs, huge increases. And when the Premier says these are individuals who haven't had a market adjustment for many years, I just quoted to him that the CEO in Saskatoon had had regular very large increases. Not that they hadn't had a market adjustment, unless 40 and 30 per cent increases are not market adjustments, but they were getting adjustments on a regular basis.

And what many people are worried about is exactly where the Premier ended his answer, is that the system isn't getting better, that there are still many doctor vacancies, that waiting lists are still longer than they should be, and that in fact there is also a growing concern that the CEOs are being rewarded, not by giving good health service but by how many cuts they can make. That's what many families are saying, that why the CEOs are being rewarded is the same as a HMO [health maintenance organization] in the United States, health management organization, private health care insurance where the less you pay out, the more you get rewarded on your salary. And many Saskatchewan families are worrying that what's happening here is we're getting privatization in the models of American health care by rewarding CEOs by how many cuts they make, and that's what they're worried about.

And we are worried definitely by the doctor shortages in rural Saskatchewan and the waiting lists and the fact at the same time is that problem isn't being solved, CEOs are seeing massive increases in their salary. And these families who live in those rural communities may be just overly suspicious that the increase in salary is tied to cutbacks and lack of health care because it certainly isn't based on better health care and . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well no, but go and talk to the families who live in places like Shaunavon where the hospital is regularly closed on weekends or Wakaw, and you'll find that they will say their problem . . .

[Interjections]

[17:45]

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. There's a couple of side debates going on. I would ask them members if they want to carry them on, they can take them behind the bar. I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — The matter of fact is that we're hearing more and more stories from communities like Wakaw and Wawota where the health care service is less than it was four years ago. These families are saying why are we paying our CEOs twice as much when we're getting less health service? Now don't shoot the messenger. I'm just telling you what I'm hearing when I'm out in rural Saskatchewan. That's what they're saying. Why is my health care service deteriorating and the managers of this system are getting rewarded for that? That's what they are saying.

Now you can say well they don't know what they're talking about. They have to understand the scales and the 60 per cent and the percentiles and all this complicated red tape. But believe me, the coffee row in Shaunavon . . . Maybe the member from Cypress Hills can go there and explain why the CEO gets \$300,000 as health care services dwindle and the hospital in Shaunavon is closed. Or the Premier can come with me to the coffee row and explain it for me, but I'm having a hard time explaining it for you as to how wage increases of 100 per cent increase for the CEOs are legitimate and the home care workers get 1 per cent and the health care service deteriorates. They don't get it.

And so I'm saying to the Premier, if you've got a good explanation for it, give it to me and I'll try to sell it for you.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — You know what, Mr. Chair? That's a very generous offer on the part of the Opposition Leader. He said if I can give him some answers with respect to the current state of the health care system that he'd try to sell it for us. Mr. Chair, we may take him up on that offer. We'll want to work with him a little bit in terms of his abilities to sell it perhaps. We want to make sure that all of the facts get out, Mr. Chairman, because the facts are pretty compelling in this regard.

Let me just start by saying there is a lot of work left to do certainly to continue to improve health care for the people of this province and more on that in just a moment. Part of the reason why there's a lot of work to be done still is because of what this government inherited three and a half years ago from the NDP. And we ought not to gloss over that. Three and a half years ago, Saskatchewan had the longest wait times for surgery in the country. Three and a half years ago, there was a . . . Well the member, the deputy leader laughs. I don't think it's a laughing matter.

We also were short nurses. The SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] said we were short 1,000, up to 1,000 nurses under the watch of members opposite. Under the watch of their health care oversight, we were short maybe 1,000 nurses, certainly 800 nurses. We had the longest surgical wait times in the country, Mr. Chair.

The College of Medicine was under probation. The College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan under their watch — and I can see a couple of former Health ministers over there — was under probation. They for a while had 60 . . . Well she, again the deputy leader is smiling and nodding. Here's the truth. For a while they had 60 medical seats at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] College of Medicine. It got down to 55 in the

'90s while Manitoba next door was training 100 every single year. Residency positions were, I think, at 60 — again not in proportion to where we should be in terms of our health care system. Fifty-two hospitals closed in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Chairman, including the Plains. That's the situation we inherited as a government.

So if the member wants to help us tell about the current situation and freely and readily admit as we do to the fact that more work needs to be done, let's start with the fact that there are today 228 more doctors added since we formed government three and a half years ago, Mr. Chairman, 13 per cent increase. That includes 88 more family practitioners and 140 more specialists. We promised 800 new nurses working in the province. We were unable to meet that target. There are 830 new nurses working in the province of Saskatchewan today.

We added \$10.5 million to the first ever meaningful physician recruitment and retention plan; \$10 million for the physician reimbursement support; 3.5 million for the establishment of the physician recruitment agency; 300 new registered nurse education seats; 40 new undergrad medicine training seats at the University of Saskatchewan; 60 more residency training positions. The College of Medicine, not only out of probation, but we're building a world-class Academic Health Sciences centre on that campus, Mr. Chairman. After what we inherited from the NDP, three and a half years later we've made a \$200 million investment, the money has flown despite the fearmongering of that member that asked the question.

And the children's hospital is not just being planned, but that project is coming together with the help of the private sector and the foundation to make sure that we leave the roll of the provinces — which included two, us and PEI [Prince Edward Island] — that don't have a children's hospital to offer. After what we inherited, Mr. Chairman, from the NDP, which is a record of the closure, the closure of 1,100 long-term care beds, this government has announced and is building 13 new long-term care facilities, Mr. Chairman. And in Saskatoon you bet we're working with the Catholic Health Ministry in building an excellent new model in seniors' care, one that is welcomed by the seniors who are going to get that better continuum of care in that facility. It's called Amicus. It's also part of our record, Mr. Chair.

Created a new 80/20 cost-sharing formula for long-term care homes in the province, \$42.7 million for facility capital repairs and equipment, \$24 million to upgrade equipment for diagnostic imaging, the creation of STARS [shock trauma air rescue service] so we can provide care to people whether they're in Frontier or Shaunavon or working in a potash mine or in an oil field so we can make sure they have the right emergency care when they need it, in partnership again with the private sector, Mr. Chairman.

So when he goes out and sells this record of ours, he can admit certainly, as we have, that there's more work to be done. But he better also be able to point to some important facts here as he does this in a coffee shop in Shaunavon or anywhere else.

The net result of our surgical wait times initiative which yes, involves a private component — you bet it involves a private component within the public system — is bearing fruit. Since

2007 we have seen significant improvements for patients. Patients waiting more than 18 months, down 70 per cent, Mr. Chair. Patients waiting for surgery more than 12 months, down 50 per cent, Mr. Chair. Patients waiting more than 6 months, down 31 per cent. Waiting more than 3 months for surgery, down 23 per cent. 83,500 surgeries performed in 2011-12; that's a 7 per cent increase. \$40 million invested for 5,500 more surgeries in that surgical wait times initiative, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to tell you, the people that are getting their surgeries a lot faster, especially those that have been waiting for a knee scope or back surgery, they don't much care if it's a new private provider within the public system providing it. They're just tired of waiting 18 months as they did under the NDP. They're happy for the surgery in two months, and we're seeing evidence of that kind of progress as well in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chairman, \$5 million in investment in terms of MS [multiple sclerosis] liberation treatment now joined by the NDP government in Manitoba and by the Yukon Territory.

Mr. Chairman, we know there's work to be done. We know that there are hospitals in our constituencies that aren't operating at an optimum basis because there's still a doctor shortage. We've added more doctors — 228 more, a 13 per cent increase. But more work needs to be done. That's why we've invested in physician recruitment. That's why we're adding training seats at the University of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Chairman, I will just say this: notwithstanding the fact that more work needs to be done, I will compare the record of this government in three and a half years on health care in rural Saskatchewan or anywhere else with 16 years of neglect under the NDP, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, going back to try to get some information from the Premier, and I hate to interject some facts into the spin and the rhetoric that's going on, but when it comes to doctor shortages, which is what I was asking about . . . And I agree that there were doctor shortages. In fact there were 84 in 2007, 84. As of April of this year the number of doctor vacancies in the province is 113.

So I understand that there were issues when we were in government. I give that. There were issues, no doubt. It's right here on your own information that there were vacancies in the province of 84. That's an issue. We should do better than that. I agree. But when you get up and say how wonderful it is and leave out the fact that the number of doctor vacancies has gone from 84 to 113, that's spin. That's not fact. And that's the point I want to make is that when it comes to doctor vacancies, which we talk about on coffee row in many communities in Saskatchewan, they're worried about it.

Now you can give a great speech and rally your troops who are sitting behind you, but the fact is that it's difficult to do that in the coffee shop in Shaunavon when the hospital is closed. And it's difficult to do it in Wawota when the nursing home beds are being closed. And the members laugh about this, and maybe it's hilarious in your area that health care is going downhill, but the fact of the matter is that there are 113 doctor vacancies in

Saskatchewan, up 34 per cent since you became Premier. That's a fact . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well if it isn't, then maybe the Minister of Health can . . . Oh, there weren't vacancies under your government. Yes . . .

The Chair: — I would . . .

[Interjections]

The Chair: — Order. Order. I would just ask that the question be directed through the Chair.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Because the minister doesn't seem to know where they are. Cypress Hills, one; Five Hills, eight; Heartland, six vacancies; in the North, two; in Kelsey Trail, six; in Churchill River, one; in Prairie North, 11. And the list goes on and on. And this is off the government website of 113, 113 vacancies.

And I say to the Premier, can you tell me again why this is a good record and why 113 vacancies is easily explained? I know it's easy to explain to your backbenchers because they're about as involved as the 13 Conservative MPs [Member of Parliament] who won re-election. The Premier will know that these vacancies are real. And when the hospital closes in Shaunavon, the member from Cypress Hills know it's an issue. These are important issues.

And when the hospital closes, the Premier can get up and give a speech about how wonderful it is, but believe me, the people in those communities think that paying the CEO 400,000 a year or 300,000 a year at the same time as we can't get doctors in place, that's not working for them. And I don't know how many times the Shaunavon Hospital has been closed in the last year, but many, many times. And it's closing on a regular basis because the CEO in the area should be doing a better job and be compensated on a basis of how they perform in delivering health care, not how many cuts and how many closures they make.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to try to answer the hon. member's question with respect to the openings, the vacancies. The fact of the matter is this. He's got a couple of Health ministers on his benches who would be able to tell him that under the NDP, the system didn't track these . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well it's true. It didn't track them. This government has set out to track doctor vacancies. You know, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was saying earlier on, well she thinks that our government should be more transparent. Well here's a few examples.

We want to be able to track the vacancies, have them publicly reported by the health region, and then respond to them with more training seats at the College of Medicine and more residency positions and improvements in terms of foreign-trained doctors, allowing them to practise, from more countries, into the province of Saskatchewan. To deal openly with the issue, to set targets, Mr. Chair, something that the former Health minister in the NDP said they would never want to do because you might not make your target. That's why they never set any for recruiting nurses. We've taken a different

approach. We think you should track the vacancies and then more than that, maybe you ought to do something about them.

And we know there's more work to be done, Mr. Chair. That's why we've made these investments. We can't fix this problem overnight. And if the member believes that the vacancy numbers he has pointed out were the actual vacancies in the province of Saskatchewan under his watch, I think he'd probably be sorely mistaken. Because the tracking wasn't happening; the goal setting wasn't happening.

They didn't set a target to reduce wait times for surgery. They didn't set targets to recruit more nurses to the province. And we have seen some closures of facilities in this province that isn't acceptable to any member here, especially members that represent those constituencies. And this is not necessarily the answer. The long-term answer is more doctors. And we will make progress and find answers for those facilities.

But I will say this, even now, before we have enough doctors to keep those facilities open all the time, those facilities close for a short time. The difference between us and them is that they reopen, Mr. Chairman. We didn't close 52 hospitals. That's what the NDP did in the province of Saskatchewan. And that's why a former NDP member — and I know that members opposite love this quote from December 16th, 2009 in the *Leader-Post* — that's why a former NDP MLA and a semi-retired rural doctor, rural physician said, quote . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the hon. member for Eastview says please, please read it, and I wouldn't want to disappoint her.

An Hon. Member: — In fact, we can table it and send it over.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — I'm happy to table it. Here's the quote:

. . . it is sheer hypocrisy [and I'm reading and quoting] for Judy Junor to carp about health care.

She and the present leader of the NDP were both part of the cabal [his words, not mine] that spent 15 years shredding rural Saskatchewan's service centres, SaskTel, SaskPower and rural highways depots along with 52 rural hospitals, firing 660 nurses and leaving 52 rural doctors no place to work in.

Mr. Chair, there is more work to be done to recover from that record. But this minister, the Ministry of Health and health regions and the Government of Saskatchewan, are making progress in terms of the personnel requirements of the system, in terms of reducing wait times for surgical care, and, Mr. Chair, in terms of providing appropriate long-term care for the citizens of the province of Saskatchewan.

[18:00]

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, again I am fascinated by the Premier bragging about a huge increase in doctor vacancies in the province and taking that as a major step forward. Thirty-four per cent increase in the number of doctor vacancies

in the province — and he says how wonderful it is and how great the improvement is.

We all know that the families in the areas where hospital closure is regular on weekends across the province, that it's a huge issue. It's a very big issue. Wait-lists for surgery, and the Premier can say how wonderful it is, but many families are suffering and having difficulty with that.

The other thing in the area of health care that I just want to touch on, Mr. Chairman, is the issue of privacy and the issue of files of families' health records and the lack of control that there obviously is in the province of Saskatchewan — not once but many, many times. All of this follows on the heels of the Minister of Health attempting to open up the health records for fundraising. And people say that this lack of importance that the Minister of Health put on records, at a time he was trying to open it up and then, thank goodness, backed off — I don't know whether from direction from the Premier or just made up his own mind that it was a bad idea — I give him credit for that. Because once you get to the point of making a difficult decision, bad decision, nothing better to stand up and say, look, I was on the wrong path. I have to go a different direction. And the minister did that.

But I think the signal was sent that these records could be distributed and put in dumpsters all over the province. And we've had many, many examples where the Privacy Commissioner has had to get involved and take action. And I wonder if the Premier could tell us what system has now been set in place to make sure that not another family's health records goes in a dumpster or is handled in an inappropriate manner.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. The hon. member started off to wrap up comments with respect to health care. Mr. Chair, I think I was very careful to say that more work needs to be done in health care, but there's been progress. And the progress is part of our record, and we're proud of that.

And the fact that people, the number of patients waiting more than 18 months is down 70 per cent, that's progress. But it should be at zero. And that's why we're going to continue with the surgical wait times initiative. That's why we're going to continue working with private clinics within the public system, utilizing regional health care centres where we can to increase capacity. We're going to do all that we can to innovate to make sure that number is down to zero. There is shorter wait times for surgery. There are more nurses. There are more doctors than when we took office, Mr. Chair. These are all points of progress. But we know when any facility is closed for any length of time in a rural community or anywhere else, that isn't acceptable. That's why we're continuing to work on the issue, continuing to make the investments in personnel issues.

For example, I was just recently told of a welcome development for Leader. I met the people of Leader, I think it was in the fall, along with the MLA. Our MLA has been raising questions about the Leader facility, the hospital there, and the shortage of doctors and its impact on that community. And the mayor and the reeves from the area made a good case to the government,

as we've heard in other places as well. And I can report to the House that the region is pleased to welcome four new doctors, including two specialists, to the region. That's in the Leader paper. It's going to help deal with some of the issues in that regard.

So you know, my point is this: my point is, there's work to be done. There's challenges remaining. But, Mr. Chairman, what we found when we inherited government from the members opposite was some serious problems that will not be resolved overnight. But we're going to deal with them. We will deal with them. We will resolve those problems. And we'll make the appropriate investments, and we'll bring the appropriate innovation to the health care system to achieve them. We'll do things that members opposite are simply unprepared to do. They won't countenance any private involvement at all, even in the public system. They said they're opposed to that even if it can reduce wait times for people.

Mr. Chair, I can remember in Yorkton a gentleman approaching me and telling me that he had had a skiing accident and finally gone to see his doctor and then a specialist. The specialist checked out his knee and said you need an operation. And the gentleman said, when? And the specialist said, well you're looking at November. And he thought well — this was just last fall — he said, well November of '11; in other words, 18 months or 16 months from then. And the doctor said, no, because of Omni, because of a private provision, I think we can do it this November, in a couple of months. The gentleman said to me, I don't even know if I'd be ready for it at that time. That's not to say that everyone's experience is that gentleman's experience and that there's not more work to be done. But progress is being made, and we will not be restricted by a tired, old ideology. People don't want ideology. They want better health care within the public system, and we're going to provide that.

Mr. Chairman, the question with respect to privacy is an important one. And we've seen these breaches recently. We've seen them. They've been occurring in the province for too long, where the people's private information is obviously not treated with the respect and stewardship that should be accorded that information, in fact where there are obvious and clear breaches. And members of the opposition were very much involved in one very, very serious instance after the budget and have raised the issue quite properly in the Assembly to get some action.

I can tell members this: that the Minister of Health has communicated with the Saskatchewan Medical Association, communicated to the SMA, to ensure that they are telling their doctors about how serious the matter is. I can tell you that we've added two temporary investigators to the Privacy Commissioner's office so that the specific investigations in these incidents can go forward.

And I can tell you that there is a prosecution currently under way, an investigation with respect to prosecution, because we're going to . . . I want to be very clear, the individuals responsible for this kind of thing will be held accountable. And we're also looking at some long-term improvements with respect to this situation. Because I think for us to send the proper message out, when someone is convicted of these charges, is found guilty, there needs to be implications. That

message needs to be sent.

There are other challenges though that can't be accommodated perhaps, even in more aggressive investigation or prosecution; for example, a doctor that passes away and is in possession of some patient records. We need to work on systems to better accommodate the privacy of individuals in all circumstances. The Minister of Health and his officials, the Minister of Justice and his officials have this as their top priority, and they have every support of the government. To the extent there's temporary resources required, they'll have the support of the government to get that done. And that work is under way.

The Chair: — I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — I thank the Premier, but I wonder whether or not there isn't — and maybe the minister can give you some advice on this — but a role for the government to play in the Department of Health to not only do instruction and teaching of doctors and the Medical Association of how to deal with records, but also in terms of storage and eventual destruction of records. Aren't there ways that we should be looking at, as a community and a society and a role to be played by the Health department, that these records that belong to the people of Saskatchewan, that there's actually a role that should be played by government, the Department of Health, at the end of the day in being more involved, this being a medical system that is publicly operated and publicly funded? And here again it's something that I think other provinces have actually implemented.

But can the Premier tell us, is there a plan in place that the government through the Department of Health would actually get more engaged in the education process, not just penalizing but actually having a program of education and mentoring with doctors? And in particular, what I understand from the Privacy Commissioner is that many of these cases are of doctors who have left the province a long time ago. And a new doctor comes in and is left with files that they had nothing to do with. And they wonder whether it's their responsibility or how that works.

But I just think there needs to be a much better system of training doctors, right from the beginning of their career, of the responsibility, and then the Health department possibly playing an ongoing role in the storage and destruction of files at a certain point if that's the way they need to be dealt with.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the question. Directly to the member's question, I can confirm that Health officials and Justice officials have been focused on a three-prong approach on the issue of patient records and confidentiality. The three areas they're focusing on with all stakeholders, the issues include storage solutions, include trustee education, and compliance. And so these are some of the areas that the hon. member has raised in his question.

I can also table for members of the Committee of Finance the letter the minister has sent to all physicians and staff which, in a very detailed way, lays out the requirements in this regard and obligations in this regard.

But I want, I want to assure members of the committee and those viewing, that may be viewing, that the government takes this issue very seriously. And ministers in Health and Justice have this particular issue as a top priority. Investigations into the most recent issues are under way right now, and we've added some temporary resources to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to deal with it.

And the minister's taking more direct action in terms of those stakeholders. That doctor education that the hon. member has suggested is under way. Maybe they have suggestions for how it can be improved. We'd sure welcome those and have a look at any improvements they might have to what we're already doing. So I'll table this and wait for the next question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — I just want to say to the Premier that that approach to the health records is a huge improvement, and one that I think the public will very much appreciate. And it's come a long way in the last 12 months from where we were debating in question period where we should open them up to the public for fundraising. And we were of the opinion at that time that, far from opening them up, we should be doing even more to keep them private. And I think this is a very, very positive move.

And, Mr. Chairman, that completes my questioning of the Premier. I think our agreed time for adjournment of the committee was 6:15. In fact I think we had a little bit of extra time because we started a bit early, and I appreciate that. But I do want to say, through you, Mr. Chair, to the staff and to the members of the staff, many of whom are here, who helped the Premier get ready for estimates, and to my staff who prepared the information, because without them it's very, very difficult to do the research that's needed to ask the questions — I'm sure the Premier feels the same in getting his answers ready — and also to the committee as a whole and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, just to thank you for putting up with the Premier and I, myself mostly for asking sometimes repetitive questions. But this is an important part of the democratic process, and I just want to thank all those involved, and thank the Premier for his answers today.

The Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

[18:15]

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. By way of conclusion, I do want to, I do want to correct the record here. What was contemplated by the government in terms of, in terms of the information, patient information, was not the kind of patient information we're talking about in terms of these breaches. That was simply a name and address information for the purposes of fundraising. It's an important distinction. I don't at all take away from the fact that there's differences in the House, and the point had been, the point that was made by the opposition, the points they made when we had the debate, the points the minister made from our side.

Mr. Chairman, I want to join with the hon. member in thanking him, thank all members of the committee for this afternoon, all the MLAs who have been here. I want to thank him for his questions, and the deputy leader for her questions as well. I

want to extend a thank you to all the officials that have joined us, and some who've now left. The chief of staff to the Agriculture minister is, I don't know, maybe donning hip waders to help Bob out a little bit, or the Minister of Agriculture out a bit, but he's left. But I want to put on the record our thanks to him.

And with the indulgence of members of the committee and with the chairman, may I thank the Table officials and through the deputy to the Executive Council, thank our public service in the province of Saskatchewan, and those who are working hard to deliver public service on behalf of us all, on behalf of the taxpayers, especially at a time we should be mindful of the fact that many are working extra overtime to help and assist those that are facing serious flooding issues across the province. We use this opportunity to thank them. It's wholly inadequate, but it's all we have, which is to say thanks to them. And we again appreciate the time we've had to debate these issues. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Is the committee ready for the question? On Executive Council, vote no. 10, subvote (EX01), central management and services. Then is subvote (EX01), central management and services in the amount of \$4,960,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is subvote (EX07), Premier's office, in the amount of 572,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is subvote (EX04), cabinet planning, in the amount of 1,001,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is subvote (EX05), cabinet secretary, in the amount of 519,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is subvote (EX03), communications office, in the amount of \$1,471,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is subvote (EX08), House business and research, in the amount of 419,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. (EX06), members of the Executive Council, in the amount of 112,000. The amount is statutory and is not required to be voted on.

Is subvote (EX10), intergovernmental affairs, in the amount of 3,160,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2012, the following sums for Executive Council, \$12,102,000.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. There being no further business before the committee, I would invite a member to move that the committee report, rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chair: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Chair of the Committee of Finance.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting. I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move the House do now adjourn for committees this evening.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved that the House do adjourn to facilitate the work of committees. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — This House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 18:21.]

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GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Premier of Saskatchewan
President of the Executive Council

Hon. Bob Bjornerud
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Crop Insurance Corporation

Hon. Bill Boyd
Minister of Energy and Resources
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Telecommunications

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff
Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations
Minister Responsible for Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Gaming Corporation

Hon. June Draude
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Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission

Hon. Dustin Duncan
Minister of Environment
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Water Corporation
Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated

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Minister Responsible for the Provincial
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Deputy Premier
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Hon. Tim McMillan
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