



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

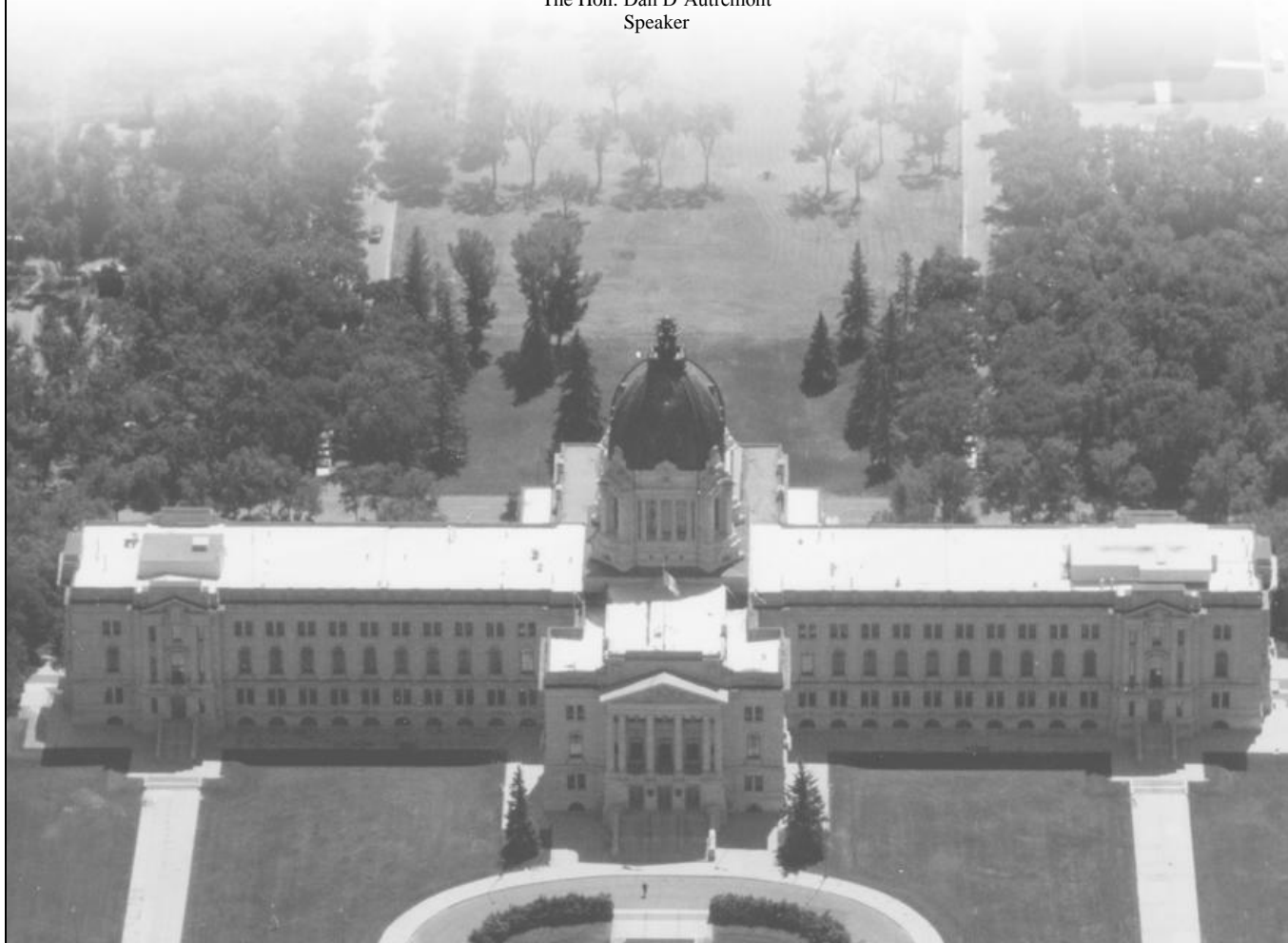
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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The Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Speaker



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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brkich): — Time being 7 o'clock, the House is now in session. Debate will resume on Bill No. 69. I recognize the member from Cumberland.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 69

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. McMorris that **Bill No. 69 — *The Information Services Corporation Act*** be now read a second time.]

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again to get back on the record of I guess Bill 69, just to have some more discussion here on it, *The Information Services Corporation Act*, Bill 69, just want to give a follow-up to finish on it. I wasn't quite done.

And I guess we look at the priorities. And when you have a government looking at a corporation like service information that is provided on behalf of the people of the province who want their information protected and felt pretty confident the way the system had worked, service information that was operated under a Crown corporation 100 per cent, a public Crown, owned by the people to make sure . . . And I guess they had safeguard and people were really comfortable with the way ISC [Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan] operated, the way it protected all Saskatchewan residents' information, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think people are very clear they would like it to stay that way. Maybe the government will reconsider before it passes this bill to take our Crowns and continue to protect them and not to let them be sold off, any sort — whether it's 10 per cent, 60 per cent — and try to say they're going to save or keep, retain 40 per cent.

I think it's something that people are not buying and it's not going over well. And I guess if people are talking, it just starts that process I said earlier, the concern people had. Here we have employees. We have an information place where it was all gathered. And there are six components that ISC protected, and people were very confident and comfortable with that. And you know, you give the staff and the organization a lot of compliments on the way they conducted business and the way they protected the information.

And I think we should be talking to the Privacy Commissioner and looking at his comments, where this is going and what his concerns are. And I think we'll get a chance over the next while, months, to visit with him, find out exactly what are his concerns, and are there concerns and is he hearing those concerns. And I think that's important to see. Here's an independent body that represents, I guess, and tries to keep things in place the way they need to be and protect the people of the, you know, of the province and privacy.

And you know, the job he does sometimes is not easy. But again I just will have an opportunity to ask him and to see what his response. And he may have responded a few times and made some comments initially, but we want to follow up with him. And I know we're going to do that and I know my colleagues are going to be doing that and we have to do that to make sure.

But having said that, again I listed off a number of things that, if the government was to reconsider and not sell off our Crowns, to keep and retain the profits every year, they could do a lot of the projects that I had said earlier in my opening comments about a second bridge for Prince Albert. There's a number of areas where we see that: addictions, you know, so there is no one turned away. The waiting list is there, and people are not asked to, you know, come back later when they're . . .

So there's many issues when you look at how the money that would be retained, the government would retain, would be great. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I look at this bill again, 69, and the way they're proposing and some of the money that, you know, we will be losing, the people of this province who truly own the Crown corporation, so when we talk about that kind of thing and we see the way the sell-off is going, it's very concerning. And this is a start.

And we've seen some of the other things that, like I said earlier, that this government was willing to start selling off. But I know there's some of the concerns that people have is truly is going to sell off our Crown corporation and to the private sector versus the public sector. And I think people have made a pretty strong argument. And let's just hope they continue to raise the issue with us.

And again, you know, I want to go back on this because I think from what I've heard from the constituents that I've talked to, from Saskatchewan people and I think people in general that are talking about this, they want to make it clear. And you know, the government should take note of this. The public does not want our Crowns privatized, clear and simple.

There was a commitment by this — and I mean, I've read into the record — the minister in 2008. The ISC annual report clearly, you know, I read some of his information, his comments about the commitment of his government. They would be keeping with their commitment and not selling off the Crown corporations. Well you know, not very long later, here we are. We're selling them off. And it's a start. And that's what people are scared of, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're concerned that people are going to watch more and more. Where does this go?

And so much stuff done sometimes in secrecy, the way the government does some of the things, the sell-off of certain things. We look at LeRoy regional park, quietly done the way the minister and all that handling . . . Tourism Saskatchewan was not handled the way it should have been handled. We go back into all these surprises.

And I commented about some of this stuff, but I know there are some people that are probably tuning in right now and trying to say, well where are we going with this? And you know, they

didn't hear my comments that I made earlier about the profits that we could be using from our Crown corporation that actually gave our Saskatchewan residents, I guess, the cheaper version, we'll say, of something. And you know, Information Services Corporation did exactly that. Sure, there was fees to people, but you know, truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think people were comfortable because they felt protected. Their information would be protected.

And the Crown corporations have done, you know, an excellent job all around if you look at them. Is it perfect? No, but people have come to expect that service being provided to them and feel safe with the information, that the information is not going to be leaving and out of the province, that somebody else doesn't have it. So let's be clear on that.

And I know government can say, oh yes, but we're only going to do this much, and we're only going to do that much. I don't buy it, and I don't think a lot of people are buying it. This is a start, so they can of course, like I said, balance their budget, balance the books to make it look like . . . So they're looking, you know, and they're hunting for every dollar they can possibly find to offset their terrible budget and the way they've handled it.

So the people have asked them to look after that. So when I see the Crown corporations and Bill 69 when it talks about the Information Services Corporation, that branch in itself is very concerning at the way we're going.

And I mean I know there's a lot of comments and different reports. And you know, the media has taken hold of this, and they're weighing in on it. There's other people weighing in on it. I think we're going to see that over time before this bill comes before this House and is law. I think we're going to see a lot of people weighing in on this and really concerned and watching it closely, I think closer than people think.

I really think some people think that, well if we do this quietly, and we do it this way, it's not going to affect them. I remind all members of this House, I think it is going to affect them, and I think people will be deciding something. Okay, you say it one way, but yet you do the opposite. To me that's a trust thing. It's like telling somebody on their doorstep, this is what our plan . . . here's our plan. We're going to do this. We're going to be taking over, you know, Saskatchewan tourism — nothing said about.

I'd given some points, Crown corporations where that is happening and has happened under the previous government. So the Sask Party government has not always done exactly what it said. So they will have to answer to that. I guess I can be a judge to a point on that, but I think the public and the voters and the residents, citizens of our great province, will come to judge the, I guess, doings of the government. And maybe they'll hope the government would be willing to reconsider and, you know, rescind this legislation and saying, you know, we're not going to go ahead with it. We're going to cancel. This is bad legislation. This is the wrong message we're sending to Saskatchewan people. We gave a commitment we would not sell off our Crowns. And here we are. We're looking for every dollar we possibly can find to offset. And we watch at the way they've gone after it.

So when I say that, again, keep the dollars in our province. Keep the money, yearly the profits that we'd have, and make sure we do some of the services that people are needing. We see our schools. We see the education cuts that have gone on to, you know, support staff, you know, tutors. So we see those kind of areas where cuts have happened. We see some of the projects that have been announced and not completed because the government doesn't apparently have the money. So the universities are in the same boat. Commitments were made to them, promises, and all of a sudden the money's not there. So I think my colleagues have expressed that concern, and we have expressed that from here.

So when we see this Bill 69 clearly getting rid of an asset that could be so good for all our Saskatchewan residents, to share that and to spread that wealth around, to making sure that we're doing what's best with our resources . . . You know, Mr. Speaker, we're always limited to the amount of resources a province can have.

And we'll see tomorrow, you know. We'll see the minister is going to present his report, his financial report, and we'll see the second quarter. We'll see where it's at. It's going to be interesting, and we'll see where it goes. And I guess some people were concerned with the last quarter when we've seen some of the cuts that were coming, the lean process.

So there's all these things happening in a time where our Crown corporations could be doing us a good service, and they do do us a good service, but the assets and the retained earnings that we get could come back to take care of Saskatchewan residents, our seniors, our youth. There's many programs, you know, that because of the financial problems that this government has got themselves in, they are now trying to find all the money they can to offset their balanced budget because they need more billboards. So we talk about that PR [public relations] and the spin, and the government at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can do whatever it wants.

I think the public's going to get a hold of it, and when the public makes its mind up, I think people will see that this type of legislation, Bill 69, is not the right way. It's the wrong way for a government to be introducing privatizing our Crown corporations the way they're doing it. They should have told the public in the election in their platform. They should have told them on the doorstep, we're going to be getting rid of . . . Instead they deny, oh no, no, no. Crowns, we wouldn't do that. Now here we go. That's why this is the start of it.

And we see some of the parks and we see tourism, and we continue to see some of the things that this government's introducing. The film tax credit, how it's impacted. We've seen how they handled the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce CEO [chief executive officer]. We see how those challenges are coming in and how this government handles anyone that opposes it. It's pretty, pretty sad.

So why don't they take those dollars and cover some of the programs that they've cut, some of the good programs that they've cut, some of the good initiatives that they've cut, some of the tax credits that helped the film industry? Those are the many things they could do if they would retain these dollars instead of selling it off. They could do a lot to help

Saskatchewan people.

And I think that's why Saskatchewan people want a government to respond to them. And clearly there are a lot of areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and community members that are feeling the rough times, whether it's expensive rent. We see the cost of living. A lot of them here . . . And the government can spin all the different ways it wants to say, you know, with the economy. We do; we encourage business. I know my colleagues . . . Yes, we agree it's good. The economy is doing good, and if everyone's benefiting from it, that's wonderful. But when it's not everyone benefiting, that there's a large group behind suffering because of the cost of living and the cost of doing business and just the cost of surviving to try to provide for their families, you know, working three jobs, part-time jobs. So there are many things going on that people are trying to do just to take care of their families, to make sure their kids are clothed, to make sure there's decent food. And some of the challenges: you look at nutrition and the cost of food. Some people are just barely making it by.

And then you look at our seniors with their rents. You look at the cost of food, of medicine, and that got passed on to them because they wanted to have a balanced budget. You know, \$5 for every prescription for some seniors. Well maybe for some seniors they're saying, we can handle it; we'll budget it. But there's some of them that, you know what, will . . . And I've been told this. They take their medication and — you know what? — the dosage is cut in half because they can't afford to pay for it every month so they're cutting it in half. And you know, no senior, no elder, no community member of this province who have served this province and have lived in this province, have done their part, should have to suffer that way, should have to cut their dose down in half because they can't afford it.

And you know, some people say oh, oh, get real. That is a reality. Some people are suffering out there. It's not all a bed of roses. So maybe we could retain this asset, our Crown corporation, keep the money, and assist our seniors making sure that, you know, they're covered, that they get the medication that they require, that the doctor says they need to be healthy, to survive.

So there are so many different issues. And I know I've got a list of things we could continue to talk about and I know my colleagues will want to talk about. But again my last thing, I hope the government does have a good look at this and say, is this the right way? Is this the way we should be going, to be selling off and privatizing our Crown corporations? I really hope they take a stop and just, you know, pause and think about it long and hard and maybe talk to some of the people out there and find out exactly, is this the right way to go?

So at that, I guess on that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm prepared to adjourn debate on Bill No. 69.

[19:15]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brkich): — The member from Cumberland has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 69, *The Information Services Corporation Act*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brkich): — Agreed. Carried.

Bill No. 70

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Marchuk that **Bill No. 70 — *The Education Amendment Act, 2012 (No. 2)/Loi n° 2 de 2012 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation*** be now read a second time.]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brkich): — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Committee Chairman. It's always good to be up in the House saying my piece, and it's with particular interest that I rise to join the debate tonight on Bill No. 70, *The Education Amendment Act, 2012 (No. 2)*, part two.

I say with particular interest and particular pleasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it's with great interest that I follow the deeds and the words in this place of the Minister of Education, the member from Regina Douglas Park. Certainly this is somebody that I've known for a long time, and when it comes to education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm reminded of what a friend of ours in common once said, the then director of education of the Regina Public School Board, Bob Brown, who had served admirably in the Regina public school system.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Education and I went to school together once upon a time. And we're in obviously a little different station. I was in grade 9 and the member was the vice-principal at Scott Collegiate at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I certainly learned an awful lot. And it's, as I say, with great interest I follow the deeds of that member in this Chamber and with particular interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that saw that individual appointed to cabinet as the Minister Responsible for Education. And this will probably sound out of sorts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have a lot of hopes for that member in this role in particular in terms of what he might add to the public affairs in this province.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's with interest that I'd seen this particular bill being brought forward, Bill No. 70. And certainly I know that the minister has done his homework in terms of consulting broadly with the different institutions listed off at the start of his second reading speech: certainly the School Boards Association; the STF, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; LEADS, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents; SASBO, the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials. I'm interested to see that consultation also was undertaken with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Government Relations. And it'd be interesting, Mr. Speaker, to know what sort of ways that the in-the-classroom experience and the community experience of students has influenced this particular legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I'd say off the top that there are a number of proposals in this legislation that on the face of them look to be fairly reasonable. And I guess again, having paid attention to the minister's second reading speech and in terms of reviewing his

remarks, reviewing the legislation, reviewing the explanatory notes, I think it's worth noting there are a number of measures in the legislation of course, and I'd like to discuss something of them tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Certainly there's a fair amount of work that goes on in terms of the consultation that our education critic undertakes, Mr. Speaker, also an educator. And that's certainly where we take a lot of our lead from in terms of how this legislation plays out in the community, how different sort of undertakings that are made, undertakings like the second reading speeches by various ministers, how that bears up. Maybe there's a bit of, sometimes a bit of variance in terms of what is assured as being consulted upon, but we'll take it on faith, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we'll also do that work of due diligence as well.

But for myself of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, you look at these things through the lens of your immediate constituency. You look at it through the lens of different critic areas, and you look at it through the sort of broader networks that we all bring to this legislature as citizens in the province of Saskatchewan.

So for myself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I tend to look at the different sort of measures being brought forward here, coming out of the inner city of Regina, coming out of a constituency with schools like Thomson Community School where there are a great number of English as an additional language students, a very diverse school and a school in which certain of the undertakings around who is guaranteed education as the immigration population continues to increase in this province and as that is differentiated under the different streams available to folks coming to Saskatchewan.

I look at it through the lens of places like my own elementary school that I went to, Kitchener Community School, which was one of the first schools in the province of Saskatchewan to implement a pre-kindergarten program in the late '70s, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And good to see certain of the ways that that has now been enshrined in the legislation and the kind of provisions that you need to make in the governing legislation, the kind of allowances being made for pre-kindergarten programming, not just in places like Kitchener, but increasingly across the province.

And I look at it in terms of the capital needs of Regina Public School Board in which I am entitled to cast a vote. Certainly in the recent trustee elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our incumbent trustee Carla Beck was acclaimed — apparently scared off all the competition or was doing such a good job, nobody wanted to get in the way of that — but certainly the way that capital needs are being accounted for by the Regina Public School Board, and again that's something I know is very near and dear to the heart of the Minister of Education.

In terms of the provisions around the boundaries, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also think about my cousins out in Montmartre region and certainly some of the interesting conflicts that they were party to in terms of which kids got to go to which school and how different sort of boundary disputes have been regulated in the past, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again one of the provisions in this piece of legislation is that 5-kilometre buffer. And certainly the analysis of the 22 conflicts or disputes that

have been brought forward in terms of who gets to go to what school and in what division and how that gets mediated, Mr. Speaker, I'm interested to see that, that provision in this piece of legislation.

I'm also interested in things like what happens with the addition of the additional trustee in the Northern Lights. Certainly my colleague, the member from Cumberland, is well familiar with that, the functioning of that school division, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and served, gave a lot of himself and his time and efforts and passion to the functionings of that school division. And the provision in this piece of legislation for the additional trustee in that division, we'll see how that again works out.

It begs a broader question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of is there a better way that we can organize our educational system in this province of Saskatchewan to better serve that gap that is there between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes, that gap that exists which is recognized by everybody from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to individual First Nations to organizations like the Treaty 4 Student Success Program — again which the minister is very familiar with, but is not recognized, apparently, by the federal Aboriginal Affairs minister — when it comes to that disparity which exists between on-reserve funding for First Nations education and off-reserve funding and the tremendous harm that I think that that does to our educational system, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where you've got students that are funded to the tune of about 60 per cent of what off-reserve students are being funded in the provincial system, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And surely, surely to goodness there's a way that we can better organize this educational system to serve those students and to serve not just our present, Mr. Speaker, but our future, and realizing human potential in terms of making sure that there's that level playing field, that there's that fair chance when it comes to something as vital as education, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also appreciate the recognition made in this piece of legislation around the Fransaskois school divisions, or the écoles scolaires. Again, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's got a very interesting history when it comes to the way that official languages are represented in our educational system, and I'll be getting into those particular measures as I progress into a fuller discussion of the legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I've got a lot of ways that I'm interested in this legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there are things in this legislation that I'm glad to see there and there are some things that need to be done in the educational system that are not referenced in this legislation but that have been delayed to a future date.

And certainly when the government says that the interim report coming at the end of the year for addressing the gap in terms of the task force that is chaired by Gary Merasty and also populated by Don Hoium, again a former director of education out of the Regina Public School Board; and Rita Bouvier, a tremendous writer-researcher out of the Métis community; and again chaired by Gary Merasty of Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation and coming out of Pelican Narrows, also the vice-president with Cameco; there's a tremendous amount of hope that I have for the work of that community, that task force, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the employment front and on the education front in

terms of putting forward some solid measures that get us a lot further down the road than this particular piece of legislation in front of us here tonight.

So again there are things in this legislation that I'm going to discuss tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there are other things that have been delayed to another day that are urgent pieces of work in terms of what we owe each other as citizens in this province of Saskatchewan, what we owe each other as treaty people in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what we owe not just to each other but to our future, to realize that potential that is going very poorly served right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the inaction and the neglect, particularly as relates to the underfunding preferred by the federal government for on-reserve education.

And again, Mr. Speaker, I know our population is growing, and I know we've got a huge land mass, but the million-plus people that exist in the province of Saskatchewan, when you get down to it, it's not, these things aren't some sort of abstract, faraway concept. A lot of these things, from my home on 12 block Cameron in the middle of North Central Regina, what happens to students on Piapot, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or in other inner cities in the province or other schools throughout the province, we are very interconnected in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And if you've got part of the educational system being so poorly served by those that have a fiduciary responsibility to stand up for it and by it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then we wind up paying the price for that in a lot of different ways. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to the day when we can stand in this Chamber debating and assessing the measures being brought forward that deal squarely and directly with that circumstance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I guess so, in terms of the work of the minister, this is a fine bit of legislation. I've got some particular things to say about it, but I just want him to know and I want the government to know that there is some work outstanding. And we look forward to that work coming and are anxious to see it on the floor of this Assembly.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the piece of legislation itself in terms of Bill No. 70, the first particular measure brought forward under the legislation is the amendment of the compulsory school age from seven years of age to six years of age. Again the minister marshals the fact that the current compulsory school age of seven has been in place since 1940. And again, you know, on the face of it, it would seem to bear some, bear some logic that you should update some things that have been in place since 1940, and that that compulsory age should be in fact moved to age six.

[19:30]

And again, you know, the work that, the abundant research that is out there in terms of the importance of that good start, in terms of not just kindergarten but pre-kindergarten and the early childhood development that is critical in terms of kids showing up ready to learn, we've had a pretty harsh report brought forward by the Saskatoon Health District, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which again underlines the fact that, you know, in the change of the compulsory age that's part of the equation but there's a broader piece of work to be done around early childhood

development and pre-kindergarten.

And I think of programs like KidsFirst, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and not just working with kids that are three to five but working prenatally to make sure that you've got the healthiest pregnancy possible and you've got the healthiest birth possible. And to the way that a lot of us take for granted the fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the idea that these things should be taken for granted. But the kind of preventative work that you can do, working with mothers to have that healthy pregnancy and working with to ensure that there's the best possible kind of birth, Mr. Speaker, and that those first months of a child's life to ensure that they are what they need to be so that the developmental track for that child is progressing as it should.

Again, Mr. Speaker, if you're not paying attention to those kind of things, you're setting kids back so that when they get to the kind of things like the compulsory age anticipated in this legislation, if you've not gotten kids off to a good start, there are a lot of things where you're just going to be playing catch-up for those kids. You're going to be playing catch-up as a society. And we see the way that the price of that is paid in many regards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, be it in, you know, unrealized earning potential in terms of labour force participation.

But you also see it in some very, very, very harsh outcomes as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as relates to people getting wrapped up into the corrections system and the kind of situation that we see in the province today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of overcrowding in our jails and the fact that you've got a system where it's not so much about the corrections and getting that second chance. But in terms of the way that the correctional aspects of the system themselves are being overburdened to the point of dubious sort of impact, Mr. Speaker, in terms of if you've got your classrooms and your rehabilitational options in the system being overtaken by straight overcrowding in the system, Mr. Speaker, again it's a lost opportunity.

You also see it in ways that, you know, in the Throne Speech the government referenced the need to eliminate the adult basic education waiting list, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again in terms of the educational system itself, you know, you'll get no argument out of me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the importance of adult basic education. And I know the tremendous difference that it made in the McCall family in terms of having that chance to go back and to get that grade 12. I know that directly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the lives of my grandmother and my father. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess the thing about it is in terms of the work that I've been able to do in the constituency, some of the most inspiring, encouraging things you'll ever go to are the grads for the different adult basic education programs that are out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the way that people have made important decisions in their lives to get back into education because it's oftentimes not just about them realizing their own potential, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but working for their family and to ensure that there's that better life for their kids.

And those are things I find very inspiring and worthy of support, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I'm always reminded of a chamber of commerce meeting that I was at where the point was made that adult basic education is fine as a corrective, as a

second sort of line of defence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but one of the critical things is that the education system needs to go better, to work better, to have better outcomes in the first place.

And again this is a challenge that I know that that Minister of Education and I know that people like yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take very seriously. And my hope is that, you know, that work progresses on those two tracks or on that broad front, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where you're working for improvements in the situation around adult basic education. Of course there shouldn't be a wait-list for people being able to access adult basic education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But it's always, to my mind, you've got to address both the symptom and you've got to address root causes as you're trying to make change in society and in the economy and in something like the educational system, Mr. Speaker.

So again, addressing that adult basic education system is one thing, but the work that you do in the educational system to begin with and the way that that is heavily influenced by people that are living in poverty, are living in dysfunction, and the kind of tools that you can give those people to try and make a better chance, a better outcome, Mr. Speaker, those are all the tracks that we need to be moving on.

So again in terms of age six being the new compulsory age as proposed under this legislation, fair enough. But it's not the whole story, Mr. Speaker, nor is it being claimed as such. But again I'd like to be debating a lot more than just the change of the age from seven to six in this legislation.

And I guess in fairness to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the change of definitions to schools to reflect that pre-kindergarten program's also being provided at school sites, where the minister refers to in his second reading speech that "The change will also reflect the different approaches for delivering the province's education programs through virtual schools as well as custody and care facility schools." Again, Mr. Speaker, I think that's on the face of it quite a reasonable change to enshrine those different schools, Mr. Speaker, in legislation, and to ensure that the definition captures the practice on the ground.

And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think about what happens out at Dojack. I think about what happens in places like the different sort of Ranch Ehrlo campuses throughout the city of Regina, but also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in ways that directly impact families and kids that I know in Regina Elphinstone-Centre. I think of course that should be brought into the legislation. And you know, again it looks to be a fairly reasonable change.

The third particular change in the legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the change of the school day definition intended to reflect the regulatory amendments being enacted on January 1st, 2013 as regards to the new school year, this of course refers to the Labour Day provision that was brought forward in the first rendition of this legislation and which is being further changed to allow that proposal to take place, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wherein the new definition recognizes that a school day could be comprised of instructional time and non-instructional time, and with the proposed revision to the definition of school day being identified as necessary to work out the new regulations

for the new year.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't say much more on that particular aspect other than two things, one of which is of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's how it plays out in classrooms and in our schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But it also sort of signals just how unawares that that particular measure was brought forward in the campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the kind of catching up that the sector and educators and I think even departmental officials needed to do to catch up to what had been proposed in the campaign, Mr. Speaker. And again we'll see how that particular change plays out over the long haul.

The fourth particular change, Mr. Speaker, wherein an amendment will grant the Ministry of Education the authority to develop policies and regulations for pre-kindergarten programs, which will continue to contribute to more consistency and accountability among the province's pre-kindergarten programs, you know, again a very good change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem.

And again pointing to what I've . . . I'm on record here tonight and certainly at other junctures in this place, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the importance of early childhood development and again some of the good work that we see this government undertaking around pre-kindergarten. And certainly we should give credit where credit is due, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and some of the moves that have been made on pre-kindergarten, we're glad to see this government taking. And certainly I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And again coming out of Kitchener Community School, one of the first schools with an actual pre-kindergarten program, Mr. Deputy Speaker — you're probably going to think that I'm too much of a homer or too much parochial, Mr. Deputy Speaker — but certainly I'm very proud to be a graduate, a product of Kitchener Community School, one of the first community schools in the province and, as I say, one of the first schools with a pre-kindergarten program.

And again the kind of opportunity and the kind of early childhood development work that that afforded many of my friends and my classmates growing up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many of my neighbours and the kind of positive impact that has, I'm glad to see that there's a more systematic, a more thoroughgoing approach being anticipated in this legislation. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll await how that plays out on the ground and how this work is followed through upon and not just anticipated in legislation.

The next change is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wherein, as referenced by the minister in the second reading speech where ". . . presently sections in the Act for non-compliance of various provisions of the Act related to school attendance, school safety, administration, just to name a few," to quote the minister.

The minister goes on to state:

Through our consultations with stakeholders, we found that the fines in their present state are out of date or are set at too low a rate to serve as any kind of a deterrent. As

a result, Mr. Speaker, fines are rarely applied. Our stakeholders want to retain the fines but have told us that increasing the fine amounts would serve as a more effective deterrent for offences.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I guess this is something that may await the committee work around this legislation, but I'd be interested to know the detail on those contentions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And certainly school attendance and school safety, you know, it doesn't get much more fundamental than that in terms of a well-functioning, productive, nurturing, learning education system.

And if you haven't got the attendance, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think about it in terms of different research that I've studied over the years in terms of the importance of stability. If a family is going to advance socio-economically, if a family is going to be able to avail themselves of the different sort of supports that are there in community, Mr. Speaker, and to, you know, just simple things like being able to build on one day's lesson to the next as regards education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that stability, that school attendance is so critical to that. So we'll be interested to see what kind of impact this particular measure has on dynamics like that in the system, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But of course there's a broader piece of work that again I know this government and I know that minister are aware of in terms of how you address these things in the round, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how you work in terms of things like housing or with the social determinants of health and how all of those things can conspire against a child's success or how they can be allies in ensuring that child's success or making for greater odds of that child's success.

So again this particular measure in and of itself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll be looking to see how it impacts/ But again there's a broader, broader front of work that needs to take place and how that interrelates with different things — like I think of the regional intersectoral committee in Regina, which again I know that minister is well aware of, the RICs [regional intersectoral committee] as they do their work throughout the rest of the province.

How you can take something like school attendance and yes, you know, by all means increase the fines if they're not having the desired deterrent effect, Mr. Speaker. But if you're going to address something like school attendance, again you need that particular measure, but you need that broader understanding of what the problem is and how you're really going to get to the root of it and not just addressing the symptom, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but addressing the root causes of it to have that better chance of success.

[19:45]

As it relates to the fines, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister in his second reading speech had gone on to talk about the increased amounts.

Fines are presently from \$500 or less for an offence. I ask that fines be increased to a minimum amount of \$5,000 for a first offence, and I also ask that fines increase to

\$10,000 for subsequent offences. Increasing the fine amount to these levels will send a clear message that non-compliance is taken seriously, which will in turn give school divisions the backing they need to impose fines if necessary.

I'm glad to see that the minister conferred, consulted with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Mr. Speaker, and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. They indicate their support, and we look to hear more from them in terms of their particular thoughts on this particular measure. And again, Mr. Speaker, the application of fines to these things, it doesn't, I think, take away from that need for this broad a reference where again addressing a particular action is one thing, but if you're going to get to the root causes, it begs a broader plan.

Mr. Speaker, the next measure in the legislation, quoting from the minister's second reading speech:

Mr. Speaker, we want to make it easier for newcomers to enrol in schools by clarifying who is considered a provincial resident. The present wording in the Act does not sufficiently describe who is a resident for the purposes of participating in our education system without cost. The regulations prescribe that tuition fees be charged to those who do not meet the criteria. Most provinces and school divisions accept children of temporary residents, refugee children, and reciprocal exchange students. However the Act presently does not clarify these considerations.

Close that quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again I think about a place like Thomson Community School and the way that in one school you've got students from quite literally around the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and giving proof to that promise in our provincial motto "from many peoples, strength", Mr. Speaker. And again it's a neat school. And if you want to see what the future of Saskatchewan can be and is, it's a great place to catch a glimpse of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And again my hope is that, in terms of this particular change to the legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my hope is that that strengthens the hands of those kids and of those families as they seek to gain something of this Canadian dream, something of the prosperity of this province, something of the opportunity of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Going on in the minister's second reading speech, to continue the quote:

This change will also support those who come to Saskatchewan from other countries on temporary work permits with children. At the present time we provide publicly funded education to those who come to Saskatchewan with young families from other countries on temporary permits for post-secondary education. This change would clarify that this right is equally applicable to those who are here on temporary work permits. Their children are entitled to be educated in the province without charge, and the Act will now explicitly state this. The change would further support our government's promotion of permanent immigration to the province. Mr. Speaker, given the province's commitment to tracking residents [carrying on in the quote], it is important *The*

Education Act be updated to ensure families who have chosen to call Saskatchewan home are not charged tuition fees for their children to go to school.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again it'll be interesting to see how this plays out in actual fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it will be interesting to see how, you know, what sort of numbers back up these trends as identified in the rationale for these new changes to the legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I guess the one thing in particular I'm interested in is what is that differentiation between the folks in the other categories and the new allowances being made for those under temporary work permits. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how those particular statuses are impacted and affected by the federal government as they seek to make changes both to immigration legislation but also to the ways that different powers have been afforded to the province of Saskatchewan, particularly as regards the changes under the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, but also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, individuals that are seeking to perhaps move beyond the temporary work permit status but progressing into a more secure relationship to an eventual track of citizenship in this province of ours, Mr. Speaker, and in Canada, of course.

And again, Mr. Speaker, you know, this is a province of immigrants, together with First Nations and obviously the Métis in this province, Mr. Speaker. But certainly I think about the dreams in the McCall family and the Wilsons when they came out from Scotland, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 1880s, and the way that the system worked for them and worked for subsequent generations of their family, to the point, you know, where here we are today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think about — and again it's not to be too narrow-minded or too sort of self-referential in these things, Mr. Speaker — but for myself I know the difference that the Canadian circumstance, that opportunity, that chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the way that made a difference in our family. And if these changes facilitate the way that it can make a difference for families from Afghanistan or the Karen people I think of from Burma or Myanmar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or people from Latin America or from Eastern Europe, again I think of how this works out through the lens of a place like Thomson Community School.

If this change can improve their lives, then so much the better, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we again, we await further proof of how this plays out on the ground and whether or not it is making that difference. And again of course, Mr. Speaker, not taking away from the broader front of efforts that need to take place if people are going to not just come to Saskatchewan but sink down roots and fully realize that Saskatchewan dream.

The next particular change in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, concerns families. To quote again from the minister's second reading speech:

Mr. Speaker, families residing along the borders of school division boundaries are often faced with a situation in which the nearest school is in a neighbouring school division. These families undergo a long process so their children can attend the neighbouring school in a school

division in which they do not reside. They must submit a request for boundary changes to school divisions and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education then processes a minister's order for the submission to amend the boundaries. Last year, Mr. Speaker, there were 22 requests for boundary changes. Of those, 90 per cent involved a student who lives within just . . . [15] kilometres of the school division boundary.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think about family of mine out in Montmartre country, and family that were involved very directly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in disputes over which schools were better for their kids to go to. And I know certainly a dispute that involved a lot of heartache, a lot of turmoil, and a lot of taking away from the kind of natural energies that should go towards kids just getting to school and getting that education. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the minister's account, again to reference his speech, the “. . . 22 requests for boundary changes. Of those, 90 per cent involved a student who lives within just 5 kilometres of the school division boundary.”

Again, Mr. Speaker, if the creation of these buffer zones can ease that circumstance and make for a better outcome and those 22 requests dwindle to two, Mr. Speaker, I think that would be work well done. But we'll see how this plays out.

Again, referencing the minister's second reading speech:

Mr. Speaker, I propose an amendment to create buffer zones that would allow students within 5 kilometres beyond the school's division boundaries to attend school in that division. We want to ensure that the neighbouring school division has the capacity to accept the student, therefore there are considerations to be made before the division accepts the student.

For example, the division will accept the student if they have capacity in the school and on the bus the student will take to attend the school. Additionally the receiving school division has to determine that they have the program that meets the student's needs. If these considerations are met to the satisfaction of the school division, the student would be able to attend the school without the family, division, and ministry having to undertake the boundary revision process.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we look to see how this plays out. The rationale seems to be fairly sound on the face of it, but we'll await for the reports to see how this particular measure plays out.

Next measure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, concerns:

. . . the reference to making capital grants with boards of education and the conseil scolaire be updated. Capital agreements will retain ministry authority to issue capital grants and will allow terms and conditions to be attached. Formal capital agreements will also be used for shared partnership agreements under the authority of *The Government Organization Act*.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll be looking to see how this plays out into things like P3s [public-private partnership]. P3s,

particularly as relates to infrastructure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can have the pretty harsh effective of kicking the bill forward to future generations in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There were a lot of things done in the '80s that we paid for in the '90s and in the last decade, and in some ways, Mr. Speaker, we're still paying for. That you would institutionalize an approach like that, bears fairly close scrutiny, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we'll be watching how this plays out with great attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The next change, Mr. Speaker, clarifying "... the submission of returns to the Ministry of Government Relations, who will include this provision in that ministry's statute. As a result there is no need to duplicate this provision in the Ministry of Education statutes," therefore repealing the statute in *The Education Act*.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem to be a fair enough proposal. And we'll be looking for the attendant or subsequent legislation coming forward for this, Mr. Speaker.

The next and second-to-last change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or Mr. Speaker:

... redefinition in *The Education Act* that will allow for regulations to be made prescribing property classes and tiers similar to municipal legislation. The change would be retroactive on January 1, 2013 and applied to the upcoming tax year. The change will allow more flexibility whenever changes are required around definitions of property class.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a subsequent change related to the way that education funding has been changed in this province and continues to be modified even as of this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we'll be interested to see how that plays out and whether or not the legislative change is equal to the experience on the ground and whether or not further reform is required.

The final proposal again, Mr. Speaker, as I'd referenced earlier on:

... based on a report in 2009 that recommended adding an additional board representative from La Ronge on the Northern Lights School Division. Presently there is only one member at large allowed for each of the two subdivisions of La Ronge. Since La Ronge is the only town in the Northern Lights School Division, the mayor of La Ronge and the school division have expressed the need to increase the number of members at large. The Act presently allows only one member at large for each subdivision. The new authority will allow the minister to grant such requests, providing that the general principle of representation by population is met and is subject to regulations.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the face of it, a fairly reasonable request. And we'll be interested to see how it plays out on the ground.

In summation, Mr. Speaker, the changes proposed under this piece of legislation, Bill 70, I think, you know, there are

different arguments that can be marshalled for any one of them as necessary and timely changes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the proof, as always, is in the pudding and if you can't, if we can't as a province come to some kind of better terms around one of the, what I think is one of the most significant challenges we face as to whether or not we succeed together or fail together, Mr. Speaker, is the whole question of how First Nations in particular and Métis people are served by education in this province, and particularly as regards on-reserve education, Mr. Speaker.

[20:00]

And again there's been a fair amount of hope vested in the work of the task force, and certainly an interim report was referenced in the Throne Speech. We are hopeful, Mr. Speaker, but we are at once skeptical given the way that that particular task force has, having been launched to great fanfare, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the way that it missed deadlines in terms of being appointed and seemed to indicate a lack of urgency or a lack of seriousness on the part of the provincial government as they worked to put that task force forward — let alone the way that that intersects with other issues that we've seen take place in this province and take place in this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

I think of things like the Aboriginal employment development program and the way that that program was summarily torn up, you know, to the tune of 100-plus agreements across the province, by facts on budget day in 2010. You know, Mr. Speaker, despite that history, despite those indications otherwise, I remain hopeful, Mr. Speaker. And I remain hopeful that the seriousness of this issue is seized upon by members opposite and by this Minister of Education and by this government and by the province of Saskatchewan in terms of just how critical it is to, again, how we either succeed together as people in Saskatchewan or how this failure is allowed to carry on and how we need to do better as a province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would conclude my remarks in the debate on Bill No. 70, *The Education Amendment Act*, in the interests of allowing other of my colleagues to take the floor at this time. I move to adjourn.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 70, *The Education Amendment Act, 2012 (No. 2)*.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried. Why is the member on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — With leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Social Services has asked for leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to all my colleagues. To you and through you, Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I introduce behind the bar tonight Senator Ed Charbonneau from Indiana.

The senator was elected in 2008 and again in 2012. By profession he is an attorney. He spent 36 years with U.S. [United States] Steel and then he said he was going to retire and ride off into the sunset, but instead he became president and CEO of a large hospital in Indiana. He's now the chairman of the environmental committee. He's a ranking member of the health and provider services committee. He's on an appropriations committee, the Senate rules committee, and he's the Co-Chair of the Midwest relations committee. I ask all members to welcome our guest at the legislature.

The Speaker: — Why is the Minister of Governmental Relations on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly, I'd like to introduce to you, behind the bar on the members' side, Mr. Speaker, Representative Deborah Berry. She was first elected state representative for Iowa in the 2003 elections and has subsequently been elected in two-year terms ever since, including most recently just a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, she was born and raised in Waterloo, Iowa and has a Bachelor of Science degree in public administration. I understand, I believe this is her first visit to the province of Saskatchewan.

We'd like to welcome her and certainly hopes she enjoys her stay, and I would ask all members to please give her a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — With leave to introduce guests.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce Senator John Nelson from Nebraska who is sitting at the back behind the bar. Mr. Speaker, Senator Nelson

represents district 6 in Omaha, Nebraska and he's in the second of his four-year, second four-year term. He sits as Vice-Chair of the executive committee. He's a member of the . . . Executive Council, sorry. He's a member of the appropriations committee and he has been for six years.

We do have something in common. Senator Nelson grew up in rural Nebraska so he has a bit of a background like some of us that grew up in rural Saskatchewan. But also after, in his early part of his life he spent three years of active duty in the navy and then joined the reserves and retired as a commander, a navy commander in the reserves.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that Senator Nelson's wife, Judy, is joining us this evening in the crowd. So I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming Senator Nelson and his wife, Judy, to the Assembly.

The Speaker: — At this time I would like to take the opportunity to introduce some other guests that we also have seated in the Speaker's gallery. Along with Mrs. Nelson we have Ilene Grossman from Chicago, who is part of the CSG [Council of State Governments] Midwest MLC [Midwestern Legislative Conference] staff. And Ms. Grossman has been to Saskatchewan I believe about eight times, and we see her at every MLC convention.

As well we have, from the Canadian consular service, Brian Herman who is a career member of the Canadian foreign service, deals largely with issues that are multilateral and international security issues and particularly the Canada-US partnership addressing global challenges. And something of interest to the people of Saskatchewan: Brian is originally from Regina, so he is actually here visiting his parents as well as participating in this exchange.

Also seated in the Speaker's gallery is Brian Shipley. He is the consul and head of the foreign policy and diplomacy service at Minneapolis. So I'd ask members to welcome our guests in the galleries.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with all of my colleagues and the Speaker in welcoming our guests from United States. It's very important that you come and participate and understand how our system works. And you've started off very easily with a gentle evening session, but maybe tomorrow it'll be a little more lively.

But the important part is that we all in our jurisdictions have our own ways of making decisions that affect our local citizens. And in Saskatchewan, you'll see some of the traditions of over 100 years that have been developed in this room, and at the same point I think over the next couple of days we'll get to hear from you how you make decisions. And there may some ideas that we should take that will assist us in what we do.

But very important to have you here, and we wish all of you the best.

Thank you.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 71

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Harpauer that **Bill No. 71 — *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2012/Loi de 2012 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this debate. And of course this is a time-honoured tradition of second-round speeches where we get to talk about questions we have about the legislation in front of us. And quite often we have a lot of questions. And this one is of particular interest. I know that some of us will have many questions about this. But I have to say right off the start that it reminds me a bit of some of the ads we see on TV. And some of the recent ads, for example last night watching the Grey Cup some of us may have seen the Canada club ad that says, the only thing that tastes better than a Canada club drink is a bootlegged Canada club.

And I guess the reference . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well that's what it said. Well where I'm going with this is that, you know, we have a long and colourful history of dealing with liquor and liquor regulations for many decades — bootlegged even. And so this goes back a long, long time and particularly with Canadian Club. Many of you will know of course the history of bootlegging in Saskatchewan and the connection to Chicago and all of that, and Regina down on College Avenue and a small town outside of Yorkton and how that all ended up going to Montreal, the Bronfman family.

And it's, you know, and of course we also even have the tradition of Moose Jaw and the red light district. If you've read that book many years ago, *Red Lights on the Prairies*, the connection with Regina, getting on the train and heading down to Moose Jaw because that's where the action was, down on River Street. And now Moose Jaw's a bit of a hometown to me. I grew up just a little bit out, called Mortlach, a village called Mortlach, but we'd always go in to Moose Jaw. That's where my grandpa lived and down on, they actually lived down on River Street, had no connections but that's where he was . . . That I know of. But I'd better be careful how far I go with this.

But Moose Jaw's a wonderful town. But I don't think there were any Forbeses in there but it was an interesting thing.

So anyways, Mr. Speaker, I have a lot to say about *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act* because it is critically important to Saskatchewan. And in many ways we support this because we think it's reasonable for us to move forward and not be so conservative. I think as we see jurisdictions across Canada and North America look at how they can become a modern, responsible society, of course that involves liquor and what that means to our establishments, to our culture, and all of that.

But we do have some questions clearly around some of the initiatives because we have some issues as well. Clearly when we talk about alcohol and liquor, there's a downside. And we have to make sure that we deal with the downside because of the tragic results if we don't do the right thing. And so in many ways we see the initiative that the government announced last week as having half measures and not completely going the full distance in terms of having a modern response to how do we modernize the liquor regulations in front of us.

And of course we want to make sure that people feel like when they're moving here or they're coming here, they're growing up here, that it's a province that is responsive. And I'll talk about some of the things that the minister has addressed. For example I know in 2008 there was the new regulation of being able to recork a bottle of wine in . . . Yes, Mr. Speaker, you're responsible for that. You were the minister at the time. And that's a fine, fine regulation. In fact our family has taken advantage of that several times because it's a responsible thing to be able to go to a restaurant, order a bottle of wine, and not feel obligated to drink all of it just because you have to drink all of it, that in fact you can cork it after a couple of drinks. Well some people try. Some people do try to drink all of it, and that's unfortunate. It can lead to unfortunate circumstances. But I think that's only reasonable and fair, and I think that the restaurants that we've been in where that's been able to happen, the servers have been very professional about it. And some people may be surprised that actually you can do it, but I think it's only a reasonable thing.

So, Mr. Speaker, we look at this, and we know that there were some 70-plus regulations and amendments to the Act. Of this there were only 10 that are in this bill, so 60-some are dealt with in the regulations, and we won't get a chance to actually debate them on the floor here because they will go through Executive Council and that will be done that way.

[20:15]

And of course we have some questions about that, and we'll be watching very carefully. And as we always do, we watch for the unintended consequences because when you have such a significant change — and they really are a significant change in an important area — that I know that I've been getting letters in anticipation of this, and so people will be watching. And it's a big, big deal. We see the change in the government philosophy of new liquor board stores and what that's going to mean for the outlying suburbs in our cities and what these changes will mean. So people will be watching for the unintended consequences.

And we know that in Saskatchewan, and I wish it weren't so, but we do have some issues about the consequences of binge drinking, especially among young people, and the impact it's having both in terms of addictions but also in terms of accidents. Saskatchewan unfortunately, you know . . . And we could tell just from this past weekend with the severe weather that we're having and the conditions of the roads and the impact, the deadly combination of that. And drinking too often leads to tragic results. And even if the weather is good, really with impairment it can be a significant problem.

So that would've been something that we were looking for:

stronger measures, stronger support for programs in place that deals with addictions, that deal with problem drinking, that deal with binge drinking and particularly drinking among young people. That in fact this is a responsibility that this government, all governments carry and carry . . . And it goes beyond party lines.

People want a safe province. We've seen way too many tragic accidents, tragic accidents where somebody in the prime of their life has been cut down, unfortunately, by a drunk driver. And you know, we're coming up to the Christmas season, and we'll see the road stop program and all the initiatives making sure that people are being responsible drinkers. Those things are fine but, Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to do more. And so that's what we would've looked forward to in the announcement around the liquor regulation, the changes to the SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] regulations, the liquor regulations.

And so I want to talk a bit about that. I want to reflect a bit on the minister's comments. And of course as I've said, the actual bill before us tonight is actually fairly short. It only has 10 changes, but I do want to just reflect on one of these, and that's the new section 116.2 and that is the circumstances in which a permittee may allow customers to bring their own wine. And if I quote from this section, "In this section, a person's **'own wine'** means wine that is not purchased from or otherwise served by the permittee." And that would be the restaurant or the establishment that the people are visiting. And the second section:

Subject to the regulations, a person may bring and consume his or her own wine at a permitted premises if:

- (a) the permit issued with respect to the permitted premises is within a class of permits prescribed in the regulations for the purposes of this section.

That makes sense. It's a relevant permit so I guess that's straightforward. And "(b) in accordance with the permit, the permittee allows persons to bring and consume their own wine at . . . [those] premises." Now it goes on to say:

A permittee who allows a person to bring and consume his or her own wine at the . . . premises shall, on that person's request, recork the person's bottle of wine by using a new cork that is fully inserted into the bottle so that the top of the cork is flush with the opening of the bottle.

So that's a little bit of trivia I'll now need to know. But it's very interesting that we'll be allowing people to bring their own wine, and apparently this is done across the country. I don't know if it's done in the United States, but it's one that will bring a new kind of dining experience, and I think that it will be interesting.

Now there were . . . I was listening to the radio the other day about what this may mean, and there's a couple of things that I think people should be aware of. Of course this does not mean that it's completely free. There will be service fees, a corkage fee type of thing where, you know, if you're bringing your own wine, it doesn't mean you get to open it by yourself and serve it

yourself. Your server will still be doing that, and they will be charging you a fee for that.

Now when we would think of a normal bottle, a typical bottle of wine that you would have at a restaurant and you see the markup, you automatically . . . And maybe it's just the farmer in me, but I just think of it as just a profit, that that's all they're talking about is the profit, but it's actually the service fee. And so there could be a significant charge. There could be a significant service fee, and it all depends on the quality of wine you bring. If you bring a cheaper, more inexpensive — let's put it that way — more inexpensive bottle of wine, then they may not be treating it in the same way as a more expensive bottle of wine, and so the fee may be different.

So that'll be interesting to see how that plays out and of course who will offer that service or not. I don't think that, if I'm reading this right, it's not every restaurant will be able to offer this. But it talks about the relevant permit, so you will get to know your favourite restaurant that you will be able to go. And I think this makes some sense because, as a person was explaining, that there's special occasions that you may want to have a certain bottle of wine, and you want to have that to celebrate an anniversary or birthday or something like that, and so that's only reasonable. So I think that's a fair thing.

The other part of the cost that people should be aware of is the tipping that because, as you would know if you go to a restaurant of some worth, that the bills are, you know, reflect the quality of the meal, also the quality of the drink, the wine in the restaurant. So you should not . . . that does not diminish your tip in a lot of ways. So this does not mean that people should be thinking that their tips are all of a sudden cut in half and they don't have to worry about that. There's you know, I mean there still is an issue of an appropriate tipping fee.

So I think that was, you know, it'll be interesting how we adjust to this, I guess is where I'm going with this. This is not just, you know, the wild west that we once were. It's not back to red lights on the Prairies. That we're expecting a mature response to this and one that reflects that, you know, that we can act in mature way. And so I think that this is an important issue in front of us, how we deal with this, and it's not one that we should take lightly. And as I said, it's not the red lights on the Prairies, and I sure hope that wasn't the intention of it.

But speaking of the colour red, it was interesting what drove this initiative that the government has brought forward. And the minister really did talk about this last week when she talked about what was the driving force of this. And she talked about how, and I'll quote this from the Throne Speech or from her speech. It was the October 2010 Throne Speech. The government announced a regulatory accountability initiative aimed at reducing red tape for Saskatchewan businesses. As part of this initiative, the government established the red tape committee, and it goes on, and she goes to say, the regulation of alcohol was her first area reviewed through the new committee process. So that was the driving force looking at red tape. And clearly I can appreciate that the liquor and gaming regulations or *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act*, and it's a fairly significant Act, had a lot of red tape. And whether it was of value or not, that's something we always have to take a look at.

Clearly as I just demonstrated when I was reading about recorking your wine, it just didn't say recork the wine. It said recork the wine so the cork is flush, level with the bottle, the lips of the bottle. So you know, they're very specific. It's not halfway in. It's not a quarter of the way in. It's all the way in. And so, yes, they're very serious about regulations. Now I don't know if it may be over there in their shop, the alcohol and gaming regulation shop that they are very good at regulations, but it's a very serious business. It's a very serious business. So they have to strike that balance between what is common sense, a reasonable practice, and what is in the interest of the community.

And so I think this is worth looking at. I am surprised that alcohol was the first target for red tape. I would have thought there would have been more. I don't know if the alcohol and gaming regulations were the most serious of the problems with red tape. I know as our government, we also tackled that issue, and that was a big thing too. But we are where we are. And as I said, that in many ways we are supportive of these changes, but we would like to have seen a significant initiative on the other side.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll go through some of these things here that I think that are important. And I have talked about the bring your own wine, that option for patrons which will be very interesting to see how this plays out and how the restaurateurs in Saskatchewan work with that and what that will be in terms of the corkage fees that people will have to pay. But I think that people will be supportive and will think that it's a new and innovative way in terms of our dining experience. And I think that, you know, when you go out and you travel around the country, you often think of your dining experiences. And I know when we go north, we think of the fishing. You know, it's where you travel and what you think of. And I think this . . .

An Hon. Member: — Wine and some fish.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, a glass of wine and some fish. And I think, you know, actually I think this could work really well. But as I said, that we hope that this will be relatively received well.

The other part that I would want to speak and just touch on just briefly is that the minister talked of two changes in this bill that will enhance public safety in establishments that serve alcohol. And I think this is an important area because clearly we have issues, and I will talk about . . . And it's been in the news a lot about Prince Albert, and I'll talk about that in a minute. But clearly if you live in an area that has bars, late night establishments, you will know the challenges that occur because people are out and about and maybe they shouldn't be.

So the first one that she talks about is that intoxicated individuals would be able to remain in a permitted establishment until safe transportation can be arranged for them, and the Act will be clarified that the permittees have an obligation to contact the proper authorities if they know of or are becoming aware of unlawful, detrimental, or prohibited activity taking place on their premise.

So there's two things there. The one first, people who have drunk too much and are asked to leave, but really it's unsafe for

them to leave. And I think this is a very, very important thing not only to the people who are intoxicated but to the general public who may actually run across these folks or, in the worse case scenario, if these folks actually get behind the wheel of a car and drive off.

So we think this is an important one, and I think that . . . And I can tell you from my own experience in our neighbourhood of Caswell, and we live right on the edge of Idylwyld, and there's three or four bars there, and we often see the results of overdrinking. And so this will be an interesting one, how it's played out in our communities. Because when people have drunk too much, it's important they don't just get tossed out. It's important that they get cut off, that's for sure, but they shouldn't be tossed out. And it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

You know, it may not be the high-end restaurants or the high-end lounges where this is the occasion. But you know, in my riding we have several places where the people are at risk because they have been drinking too much, some might even call it self-medicating because they're addicted. They have addiction issues that they're really dealing with. This is not a Saturday night issue, but it's important that there be some responsibility for looking after these people, and I think this is critical.

[20:30]

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I remember when just . . . it's only been a few years and now P.A. [Prince Albert] is talking about this, that Saskatoon having a full-time detox centre and how important that is and how we're dealing with public intoxication. So hopefully this will lead to more work in terms of that area, that people are just not tossed out, but the question is to make sure they have safe travel to some place. Now it could be questioned, where do they go? Are they going home or are they going to a detox centre? Are they going to the police station? Who determines that?

It'll be interesting when we have the questions in committees to know what the plan is there. And again, what is the plan for the people who are working in the establishment? Will they . . . And maybe perhaps this'll lead to earlier identification of people who've drunk too much, who are intoxicated, because it's just easier not to deal with it when they've gone too far. So let's hope that's the story here, that in fact there'll be an earlier cut-off because if people know they have to deal with people who've drunk too much, that's got to be a problem, and then they have to wait for the taxis. They have to wait for some ride home, and that's a problem.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the second one talks about the amendment will contribute to public safety and the change will clarify that permittees are accountable for illegal activity occurring in their premises. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not sure, permittee, that's a different kind of word, I've not ever really used that word, but the owner of the establishment, I'll say for the folks at home.

This is an interesting one because — again I'll draw on my own experience living in Caswell and having several bars just across the way on Idylwyld — that the intention is about illegal

activity occurring in their premises. So I assume they're talking about trafficking, drug trafficking in the bar that might be dealers doing that kind of stuff, drug sales, that type of thing. But I'm wondering if when they use the word in their premises, what happens in the parking lot? You don't usually refer to the parking lot as in their premises. On their premises would have been a better word because often I am more concerned, as a member of the public, about what's happening in the parking lot. And often people who run these bars and lounges aren't aware of what's happening in the parking lot. In fact they're only concerned about what's happening inside their four walls, but they don't understand that their premises also include the parking lot. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know if you've been to some of these bars late at night, where you've seen the waiting lines and people are waiting to get into the bars, and they're quite long and it's gets to be kind of a raucous type of, a raucous kind of thing. You know we often see pictures of that in New York City or someplace else, but in fact it's happening here in Saskatoon, Regina, and other cities here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that while the idea of the two safety regulations or amendments to the Act are worthy, we think that they could've gone farther and we'll be watching those and we'll be talking in committee about what other things could be done. You know, Mr. Speaker, the irony of what happened last week was not lost on many of us, that on the day that these announcements were made, several of us were downstairs in a breakfast with the kids from the prevention institute, talking about issues about binge drinking and how do we deal with that.

And I think that is a reality that is coming home more and more. And I don't know why it's happening more. You know, we hear stories about United Kingdom and other countries where this is a problem, but we have issues here in Saskatchewan about that. And it's one that we need to address head-on. And while we're glad to deal with the red tape. And we're glad to modernize and, you know, as I've said, you know, I've taken advantage of some of the newer regulations and I think they're smart and we can all agree, but some of these things are other issues across party lines when you're talking about binge drinking and the results of that, either short-term where that leads to accidents or alcohol poisoning.

You know one of the other issues we have, and I've not heard stories about this in Saskatchewan, I know we do . . . the kids have . . . often get into binge drinking, but the other caffeine drinks, the ones that students use to stay up late at night to make sure they can study all night, but the deadly combination of those drinks — and with some of those drinks, not all of them, but some of them — and alcohol can be just tragic. And so we need more of that kind of thing.

So it'll be interesting to see what the impact of this bill is, these regulations. Are they expecting this to be cost neutral? Will there be more money coming in to the government coffers? You know, I know that tomorrow we'll hear about the mid-year financial report and the minister's alluded that things are much better and that we'll be pleasantly surprised tomorrow. It will be interesting to know whether revenues have gone up in alcohol and gaming, and I'm not sure. We'll wait until tomorrow to find out. But now for the folks at home, we'll wait until tomorrow to find out.

But if revenues do go up because of the results of this, and we won't know for a year or several years down the road, I think it would only be wise for us to reinvest that into addiction and drinking education programs and that type of thing to make a commitment that we can drink in a mature, reasonable fashion and that everyone can be safe in this province. We don't want to see a situation where, as I said, this becomes the wild west or red lights on the Prairies, and then 100 years later we can all chuckle about the stories that we hear about Moose Jaw or Regina, the bootlegging down to the States. But clearly they were tragic, tragic times, you know. And so we need to be very, very careful about that.

And we know one city for sure is wrestling with that and of course that's Prince Albert. And, you know, they're dealing with the reality of people wrestling with addictions and the access of liquor in their city. And I know, and the minister has alluded to the fact that maybe they could make their own bylaws in dealing with this, but clearly this is the kind of issue that we have to come to terms with. And I'm not sure if it's isolated to the city of Prince Albert. Is this the only city that we know of or it just happened to be the city that CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] last week talked about? And this is a story from November 19th and it talked about, "The city of Prince Albert is losing the battle with the bottle — as public drunkenness rates soar higher than any other city in Saskatchewan."

And you know, Mr. Speaker, the city has a population of 35,000 but it racks up more intoxication arrests than either Regina with a population of 193,000 or Saskatoon with a population of 222,000. And the new police chief, Troy Cooper, said and I quote:

Despite the good efforts of the people at health and addictions dealing with the issue, despite the good efforts of government at having an acute detox center, the problem is growing, and that's concerning to us.

So the police chief is seeing this. And now he goes on. This is what the actual results or the totals were for public intoxication. Last year, 2011, there were 2,808 arrests for public intoxication compared to 1,876 in Saskatoon. So you think a city of 35,000 having approximately 3,000, like 1 in 10 — 1 in 10. Now I don't think it's everyone in the city, but there is some serious issues there. Or even . . . say 1 in 15 for public intoxication. That's a significant issue. This seems to be the issue that clearly has gripped the city.

And they say, they go on to say that statistics show the problem is getting worse. Between 2010 and '11, the number of arrests went up about 6 per cent. Now when you're talking about nearly 3,000 arrests, 6 per cent is a significant number. It's a significant number. And so far in 2012, the numbers are up about 8 per cent compared to the same point last year. So you see from one year it went up 6 per cent, then another 8 per cent. So a total of 14 per cent.

And then Cooper, the police chief, goes on to say the high rate of public intoxication is putting a strain on policing. About 40 per cent of arrests are alcohol-related. And so that's a real challenge, and that's a real challenge for our third-largest city and we need to be able to give them support. And, you know,

while the police chief says some of the things we're doing are good, but clearly this is a crisis that they're trying to deal with. And I don't know how they felt about the announcements last week, but I think they would have felt a lot better if they felt there was another part to it, another part to it so they could deal with these issues in the city. Because we know that crime and drinking are largely related, and all the other issues: family abuse, all sorts of things, problems at work. It's a huge issue.

And then CBC went on and did a poll and this is what their online poll . . . and of course it's not scientific; I'm not saying it is. But it's worth . . . it also gives you a second look. Compared to the previous generation, how are we doing with the issue of abuse of alcohol? And the response was, much worse, 45 per cent. That was about 372 votes. About the same, 41 per cent, 339 votes. And much better compared to a generation ago, 14 per cent. So only 14 per cent, or 116, thought that we were doing much better than our parents in terms of dealing with alcohol.

And that's a sad statement that we think that, you know, in terms of our increase, in terms of our education levels. And in fact we're a much more, much more highly educated society than we were, than our parents were. And we all know that and that's not . . . That's a given. That's a for sure, that we should be able to deal with addictions. We should be able to deal with alcohol. Clearly it's not an issue of literacy. It's something else. And so this is something else, you know. And we have better health care. We have better professionals. We have so many other things going for us, but this is something we still wrestle with.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, I mean we're clear that we support the changes that they're modernizing, but there is this other part that needs to be dealt with. And we really do believe that we owe it to our generation, but particularly to our children, that if we do have the tools, if we had the capacity and the knowledge that this is a problem, then we are definitely obligated to do something about it.

And this is why I say that we are looking forward to the other shoe. We're looking forward to the other part because we cannot let this go. And this is a serious issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's one that we cannot lose sight of. And while it seems relatively simple and straightforward and we support social drinking, but then when it gets out of hand, we have to have the support for those who find it difficult. And it's something that we just cannot, we cannot turn a blind eye to.

And I think that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need to be able to have that serious conversation, and if we can't, then we have a problem. You know, clearly it is a responsibility of government. Alcohol and gaming is a big, significant responsibility of a provincial government. So clearly this is a job at hand.

But so is the health care and all the things that come along with it, whether it's addictions, whether it's mental health, abusive relationships, the outcomes of alcohol abuse, and whether it's detox — all of that. We've heard too many tragic stories of when things just go wrong. And suicide, clearly that is one. And I'm glad that my colleague raised that. Suicide is one that particularly young people, when they feel the despair of things, not being able to do the things that we think they should be able

to handle, and life has got out of control because they're dealing with an addiction they can't get control of . . . And alcoholism is a significant, significant problem. And when you see that kind of poll result that some 15 per cent, only 15 per cent think we've got a better handle on it than the previous generation, clearly we've got work left to do.

[20:45]

And so you can go through the list. And there's many stats about Saskatchewan. And as I said, it was just somewhat ironic and not lost on many on this side that the announcement was made during Addictions Awareness Week.

But you know, and we're not alone in this. There are other observers and people who are talking about this. You know, MADD [Mothers Against Drunk Driving] reports that Saskatchewan has the worst drunk driving record in the country and says the province is doing little about it. And of course, we all know MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, significant folks that we have to listen to because these people — many, many of them — have felt the pain of what happens when somebody gets behind the wheel drunk and should not be driving. And they've worked tirelessly to get their points across that we must do more about this to stop drunk driving. And so we need to do something about it.

So here what the, this is what MADD says about death rate from drunk driving. "In Saskatchewan, it is more than double the national average, 8.44 per 100,000." And MADD said this in April, that the province, and I quote, ". . . has not enacted [and this is where] any significant initiatives in the past three years." So we need to do something about this and this should be done hand in hand with these regulations. It's clear that red tape . . . You should do something about red tape, but there's a social implication of these changes that must be addressed.

And of course, you know, we talked about the Prince Albert public intoxication where it's gone up some 6 per cent in the previous year, 8 per cent for a total of 14 per cent over two years — more arrests dealing with public intoxication than compared to Saskatoon. And how does that work?

So this is something that needs to be dealt with and it's one that cannot be ignored. I know that many, many folks will be talking about this and watching this, and particularly over the Christmas season. You know, we all will be going to different social functions and we will all hopefully come home safe, but we all hope that we do it in a responsible way.

And it is interesting to see how younger people are dealing with this. On one hand, you know, it's very encouraging to see, and I see this with my own kids, that they're used to having designated drivers, and somebody will be that person. But you know, Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is something that we have to wrestle with because as well with those kids, they've come to know the tragic results that we can go through. And I know, and I know everyone in this legislature will know of some tragic circumstance where . . . And you can go through the different benchmarks, and whether a young person was killed in a drunk-related vehicle accident, we all know people who are dealing with alcoholism, and whether the pain of what that means in terms of relationships, what that means in terms of

their work, lost productivity, just as we talked earlier in terms of the suicide issue.

And clearly in the North that's a particularly huge issue, one that's very, very tragic because we never know what the potential and realized would be from those folks. But if somebody felt so bleak that their future felt so bleak that they had no other alternative then, and we know that in many ways alcohol is the enabler of that, well this legislation, these regulations, ease the access for that.

We also hope that we see, and we encourage the government, and we'll be watching the government to make sure, and we're pretty confident that the staff at SLGA are very aware of this and watching the unintended consequences, that we don't see any further increase in terms of alcoholism, binge drinking, and that type of thing, and in fact, that we can get a better handle on this. But we know many cases, that's not the case, that in fact if you simply ease the access to liquor that people get it easier. That follows, doesn't it? It's pretty straightforward. We'd like to think that people will be more mature about it, and we worry about this. I worry about it because in my own riding and in Saskatoon Centre, we've seen a real change in terms of the communities that wrestle with ease of access and whether, you know, the liquor off-sales that are attached to restaurants just make it that much easier. And it's a tough, tough thing, a very tough thing.

And we see people who deal with tragic circumstances and turn to the bottle. It sounds kind of simplistic and that type of thing, but I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've just had phone calls, actually in the last couple of days of a fellow whose daughter had died, and he's in detox and he's calling about . . . He's just really in a messed-up state. And this guy is just really was somebody who had a very productive life and he's dealing with some real issues. And I know when he's straight and good, he's a wonderful guy but alcohol and drugs have got him in a tough, tough spot, and it's hard for him to deal with real life, tragic circumstances.

But you know, this is a thing that we need to do. And we talk about education, public education, strengthening education so young people can learn those skills of how to, how to survive the tough blows that we'll all get. We all get tough blows. You know, if somebody passes away from something tragic, we have to be able to respond. We shouldn't be able to turn to a drink to resolve that.

So as I said, Mr. Speaker, I think that this is that kind of legislation that it is within the mandate of the government and it is their responsibility to make sure that the regulations do fit the society we live in. And so many of the changes we are supportive of and we think it's a matter of getting with the times. But as I said, the other shoe, the other half is significant. And we'll be watching over the next year or two to see if there are more resources put into addictions, put into detox, to also to support the police, to support the circumstances that we see in Prince Albert. And so we can all rally behind this and say that we're ready for it. And I hope we are ready for it. But sometimes I worry that, I worry that when we just use red tape as a driving force and profit motive, that's not good enough because the social costs are real too.

So I see a little bit of that when I see those two safety amendments. It'll be interesting because, as I said, in my riding we deal with that an awful lot. It'll be interesting to see if the establishments actually do keep people in the bars before they toss them out, when they know it's going to be dangerous. And you know how harsh the winter months can be here, when somebody is tossed out who shouldn't be — should be kept in. And you know the end result too, if they're not serving them up to that point where they're too intoxicated, that's actually not a bad thing. Because they know the impact is they'll have to look after them when they've had way too much. So I hope that's the results.

And as well, you know, as I said, the parking lot issue, that that's also considered when talking about illegal activities. It's not just within the four walls, but it's also on the parking lot that the owner of the establishment is responsible for what goes on in the parking lot. That's hugely, hugely important.

So I don't want to go on to too many specifics within the 70-some amendments. We could be here for quite a while. And as I said, it's not a matter of yea and nay on both of those. I mean it will be 60-some of them will be going through the cabinet, and we won't see them until they're published in the *Gazette*, and that will be that.

But we will be watching over the next year or two and just to know that we think this a hugely important issue in Saskatchewan. It's not just modernizing, but it's modernizing with a social conscience that we will look out for our young people and we will look out for those who are vulnerable to make sure that they don't find themselves in a circumstance that boy, we all wish that nobody was in, and that in fact we reduce the number of accidents on the highways which are outstanding for Saskatchewan when you compare them across Canada, that in fact that we can see those fatality rates, we can see those fatality rates decline. And I think that's the call that this government must answer.

As I said, we'll be looking at the financial papers tomorrow and to see is more of this money . . . And particularly if this is done as a profit motive for the government, then clearly they have a moral obligation, a moral obligation to do more work around education about responsible drinking and around suicide prevention, all of those things that are connected to this.

And so, Mr. Speaker, with that I know many, many of us, almost all of us will want to talk about this, and of course we'll have a lot of questions when it comes to committee. And as I said, that there was time . . . We have quite a history in Saskatchewan. You go back to the red lights on the Prairies or the bootlegging into the States. Of course that's all colourful and interesting reading now, but those times were challenging too. But it's time for us to get with the times. But as I said, we must do more to deal with this. And of course the whole issue of addictions, drunk driving, and fetal alcohol syndrome is very important as well.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I know many of us will have questions about this. We'll want to rise and speak at some length about this because it's an important issue. I have got letters about many of the issues here and people are concerned about that.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to move adjournment of Bill No. 71, *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2012*. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Centre has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 71. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — That's carried.

Bill No. 45

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Hon. Mr. McMorris that **Bill No. 45 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Saskatchewan Telecommunications) Amendment Act, 2012*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak about Bill No. 45, *An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act and The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act*. And this legislation is to be called *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Saskatchewan Telecommunications) Amendment Act, 2012*.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill is only one page long and unfortunately it includes quite a number of issues in that one page. And so I'm going to take some time here to look at what this legislation appears to be doing.

There are effectively a couple of issues that are being dealt with and they go to the heart of how a Crown corporation — when here we're talking about two separate Crowns that are related — how they finance their activities and what kinds of accountability structures are in place that would govern that financial activity.

So let's look at the first part of this Act, and that's basically section 2. And in section 2(2), a provision is deleted from the present Act and another provision put in place. So the existing legislation right now says — for *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act*, so this is the SaskTel Act — that when where a purchase price or sale price of real property included in one transaction exceeds \$100,000, the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall be obtained.

[21:00]

Quite a simple, straightforward statement, but what does this mean? What this means is that every time that SaskTel buys some property for a building or for a site for a cell tower, I think the minister identified, or for any other activity of SaskTel, that particular transaction needs to be recorded in a format that would go to the provincial cabinet, and the cabinet would have to make a decision which results in an order in council. An order in council is usually signed by the Premier and then by the Lieutenant Governor, or sometimes it'll be the Deputy Premier or another minister designated to sign it and then by the Lieutenant Governor or the Chief Justice as the signing

authority for the Lieutenant Governor.

So why this procedure? Why this type of a piece of legislation here? Well practically, the issue that arises is that you want to have public scrutiny of transactions that are, in this case, greater than \$100,000. Now the argument appears to be from the minister that that limit of \$100,000 is too small. Now that's one argument that people can take, but the other side of that is that the public will then have orders in councils or official records that are public of all transactions where SaskTel purchases property. And you know, maybe a little bit of extra effort for SaskTel to do that, but I'm not certain that the remedy that's proposed in this legislation is actually of benefit to the public. And let me explain why.

So that existing provision right now, where it has to be very public when any property worth more than \$100,000 is purchased or sold — and by public I mean it becomes an official order in council which is on the record with a number that we can all go and look and read the actual decision — what's being proposed in this Bill 45 is that that clause should be replaced with this clause:

“(3) The corporation shall obtain the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council if the purchase price or sale price of real property included in one transaction entered into by the corporation exceeds the amount fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council”.

Now that seems reasonable on the face of it, just like the previous one. But the catch is we don't have a clear amount of money stated in this particular legislation. And the amount can actually be fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council from time to time without having a scrutiny by this legislature. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues over the years has been the ability of governments to spend money outside the scrutiny of the legislature. So this particular provision gives the discretion to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to set the amount of the purchase price or sale price of real property.

So what could happen? Well that amount could be set by order in council to be \$1 million or it could be \$5 million or it could be some larger amount, effectively meaning that property could be bought and sold by this Crown corporation without public information being provided in the way that this particular legislation sets out. So what that particular clause and what the suggestion here is that it gives much more flexibility to the Premier and the cabinet to borrow money, or in this case particularly sell or buy property for SaskTel without doing the full paperwork that would give the public the information that they need when this particular transaction takes place.

Now as we go further into section 2 of this Bill No. 45, we go to section 2(3). And what happens there is that the existing provision in section 28 says:

The said sums of money shall be raised in accordance with the provisions of *The Financial Administration Act, 1993*, and may be borrowed for any term or terms not exceeding thirty years.

So that's the existing legislation in this Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act.

And this change that's being proposed is this, the new clause would say:

“(2) Any moneys that the Minister of Finance is authorized to borrow pursuant to subsection (1) are to be borrowed in accordance with *The Financial Administration Act, 1993*”.

So what they've done is removed the restriction on borrowing for longer than 30 years.

Now what's the implication of that particular clause? Well the implication is that money can be borrowed for 30 or 40 or 50 years, which reduces the amount payable in each year for that loan. But it stretches out the responsibility, you know, for one or two, maybe even three, at least two generations of people. And the present legislation that we have, under the SaskTel Act, *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act*, says that we shouldn't be borrowing money for longer than 30 years.

Now why is this an issue? It's an issue because, as the minister says, there's abilities now to borrow money for longer than 30 years. But it's an issue for us in opposition. It's an issue for the public of Saskatchewan because we've all seen and heard what the federal Minister of Finance Mr. Flaherty did just a few months ago. He stepped in to the whole home mortgage market and said, we're not going to let people borrow money for longer than 30 years because they get themselves financially committed in situations where they are not able to pay the money back. And we all know that the effect of that has been a bit of a chill on the housing markets in Toronto and Vancouver, maybe less so in Saskatchewan. But even here, people don't qualify to borrow as much money because they're not able to lower those payments and spread them over, in over 40 years.

And so, Mr. Speaker, what it strikes me as, that the purpose of this particular legislation is to give the province the ability to borrow more money and spread it out over a longer time and get ourselves into a financial situation which is more difficult.

We know that the federal government stepped in on the home mortgage issue around this length of time to borrow money because they were concerned about the kinds of commitments that were being made. And we all saw in the newspaper articles and the television stories about this about how much lower value a house people could afford to buy when they had this 30-year limit on their mortgage. Because people would go into a mortgage broker or into a bank or credit union and say, on my budget I think I can afford \$1,400 a month to buy a house. And the mortgage broker or the banker or credit union manager would say, with \$1,400 you can borrow whatever the amount is if, say, it's 300,000 or \$250,000 at the present mortgages which allow the purchase over 40 years. Well all of a sudden when that limit was 30 years, the \$1,400 allowed them a considerable amount less money available to buy a house, and all of a sudden they couldn't afford as big a house as they thought they could, based on the mortgage ability.

Well it's exactly the same principle that's in this particular legislation, only it's going the opposite way of what the federal Finance minister has warned Canadians about. This is going the other way and giving the Government of Saskatchewan — the present Government of Saskatchewan, the Premier and the

cabinet — the ability to borrow money over a longer period of time. And therefore you're able to borrow more money, but you're also making longer term commitment that puts people in a financial pickle over a longer period of time. And so, Mr. Speaker, this short piece of legislation has in it then two pieces. One is accountability about purchasing and selling of land, but a second one is the accountability about how long money can be borrowed for.

Now when you look at the legislation section 3 you get into the next part of the amendment. And it's basically the amendments related to *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act*, and it's the same kind of amendment. One of them is to allow for the sale or purchase of property worth more than \$100,000 and the second part is the ability to borrow money for longer than 30 years.

And so both parts of this legislation are allowing the government to step into a Crown corporation, provide less accountability on what they're buying and selling as far as property is concerned, and then borrowing more money over a longer period of time, therefore creating a longer and more expensive commitment for Saskatchewan people.

Now when I look at the words of the minister on this particular point, the way he describes it, and I quote from November the 5th, and this is the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure, the Minister for SaskTel. He says:

Over the past five years, the Canada bond market has expanded to include bonds issued for 30 years or more. This financing option, which has not been available to the province or SaskTel for a very long time, is made possible now due to our recent credit upgrades. The provincial Department of Finance has started borrowing at these longer terms, and should we fail to amend this restriction, it could potentially impact SaskTel's ability to participate directly in the provincial borrowing program. If the provincial Department of Finance determines the borrowing for a term longer than 30 years is desirable for the province and SaskTel cannot participate, then the interest costs that SaskTel will be paying will be higher.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I put that whole quote on the record because it goes right to the heart of what's wrong with this bill. It goes right to the heart of this ability to borrow and spread the cost out over a much longer period, and it doesn't come back and look at the question of how much is this actually going to cost the people of Saskatchewan.

One of the reasons that these previous restrictions were here as it related to the term of borrowing was because of the fact that commitments ended up being made at certain times in the history of this province that ended up costing everybody way more money than they should have.

And, Mr. Speaker, this may be another sign that we've been seeing in different places that the government is running out of money in the total amounts they have available. This gives some flexibility to borrow some more money and spread that return, or the cost of it, over a longer term. Because just like when you're buying that house that's too expensive for your budget, if you can borrow it at a 40-year mortgage instead of a

30-year mortgage, you can afford to borrow more money. And, Mr. Speaker, when you're paying it back after whatever the length of the term of the loan is, you will have paid a lot more money. But if you're in the present situation as we are now in this province, and you need to somehow have the books show that your expenses are less, this is one of the things that you do. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the concerns that I'm raising about this one-page bill do relate to the finances of the province.

[21:15]

Now, Mr. Speaker, why are these restrictions here? Well I want to go back and review some of the information that we received in February of 1992. And this, in February of 1992, the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission came back with a report to the Minister of Finance of the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, this report is quite lengthy and I encourage people to read it if they get a chance. I think it's about 190 pages approximately. But the important part of this particular Saskatchewan financial management review was that it went and looked at a number of issues related to the finances of the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, I think the best way to summarize what it was looking at is to look a bit at what's in the report.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they started out by looking at the challenges that were being faced in the fall of 1991 and early spring or winter of 1992. And the issue was that Saskatchewan was in a very, very difficult financial situation. And it was a combination of many sort of international issues, local issues, but the biggest question, the biggest issue was that government spending was beyond the ability of the province to generate the revenue to cover that spending.

And so, Mr. Speaker, they went and looked at, okay, how are we keeping the books in the province of Saskatchewan? How are we into this situation where we don't really know how much the province of Saskatchewan owes and how much we have to pay on an annual basis? And so in chapter 2 of this report . . . chapter 1, they set out the challenges and the issues.

Chapter 2, they started looking at accounting principles and what kinds of accounting principles a province should use. And this is where they set out quite clearly that public sector accounting principles as prepared and promoted by the private accounting firms as well as the Provincial Auditor should be used for examining all books of the province. And they went through what the implications of that would be for the province.

Then they went on in chapter 3 to take a look at the financial position of the province. And this was a bit of an issue because they hadn't really had a budget in that last year of that government, and so they ended up having to try to reconstruct and figure out what kinds of commitments were out there. And it's a very interesting read to see how many guarantees of loans or guarantees of projects where there hadn't been a proper accounting of how much was actually owed. And so that part of the job of this group of people on the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission was to actually figure out how much money is owing by the province. So in that chapter 3 they set out the financial position of the province.

In chapter 4 they got into a review of all the transactions and

commitments and the process of how the province had been involved. And this chapter and the subsequent chapter around their observations and conclusions around transactions and commitments is why I'm referencing this particular report as it relates to Bill 45, which is this legislation around the SaskTel and . . . Sask Telecommunications and Sask Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act. Because what the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission did and said . . . And I guess it's often referred by shorthand by the Chair's name, the Gass Commission, for Don Gass who was the chairperson. What they said was that there were a number of issues around the process that commitments were made and the borrowing that took place. And they said there were within government some good practices that were taking place around some major projects but, unfortunately, around a whole number of other projects, the ability to manage them hadn't been properly done.

And, Mr. Speaker, it was when the discretion or when the governors — if we can use an old term about engines — the governor that kind of keeps the thing from running off the wheel, kind of. I mean the whole flywheel, everything flying apart. When that governor isn't properly positioned in the whole operation, then you can end up with things that actually cause everything to blow up. And, Mr. Speaker, the legislation that we are talking about here, Bill 45, is a type of governor around the buying and selling of property within SaskTel or SaskTel holdings . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask leave to introduce guests.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my privilege tonight to introduce to you Senator Mike Vehle. He's here visiting from South Dakota and Senator Vehle lives in Mitchell, South Dakota.

He was elected to the South Dakota House of Representatives in 2004 and 2006 and was elected to the South Dakota senate in 2008 and 2010, and now was recently elected again to the senate in South Dakota just recently.

And the senator has quite a resume here. He served on the agriculture and natural resources committee, and the transportation committee in the House of Representatives, and also as a senator was appointed chairman of the senate state transportation committee, also served on the agriculture and natural resources committee and judicial committee. And the resume goes on and on, but please join me in welcoming the senator to our legislature. And he and the other members from the Midwest United States will be around the legislature for the next few days. So please welcome them to our legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the

Opposition.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 45 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Saskatchewan Telecommunications) Amendment Act, 2012* (continued)

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this particular bill . . . I think I can also recognize the member from South Dakota in the sense that my grandfather lived in South Dakota from 1905 to 1912. And he worked as a well driller, drilling both water wells and oil wells. And he drilled a lot of wells around Mitchell, South Dakota, working for the man who later became the governor of South Dakota.

And I know that a few years ago when we were visiting at Rapid City for the Midwest legislative conference meeting, we went over to see the graves of my great-aunt and great-uncle and other relatives there, and it's very clear that there are a lot of ties between South Dakota and Saskatchewan.

And one thing we know about South Dakota is that they don't like a lack of accountability in how money is borrowed by governments. And so, Mr. Speaker, I think that some of the questions that I'm asking tonight relate to that basic common sense Saskatchewan perspective that says, let's not get ourselves into trouble by changing the rules of borrowing in a way that lacks accountability, that lacks basic . . . lacks or prevents basic information from going to the public of Saskatchewan and causes further difficulty for the province.

So now, Mr. Speaker, I was just in the middle of explaining why the *Report of the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission* dated February 1992 relates to this particular bill. And, Mr. Speaker, it relates to this bill because what the bill is doing is taking off some of the controls or the limits on how much money can be borrowed by SaskTel. And, Mr. Speaker, that's always a dangerous thing to do when you're getting an inkling that maybe this government needs to borrow money against Crowns to fund some of the things that they're just doing in their regular business. And, Mr. Speaker, we will get a little more information tomorrow I think when we see some of the financial reports, but the kinds of changes that are being made here are troubling.

Now another aspect of this report is that it really starts talking about how decisions are made and how you want to make sure that there's full accountability of your borrowing decisions and, as in a peripheral way, how you buy and sell assets within a Crown corporation.

And, Mr. Speaker, we I think — and I guess I speak on behalf of what I would say is a vast majority of Saskatchewan people — want to err on the side of caution and make sure that there are the limits on the reporting of transactions and on the extending of the borrowing beyond 30 years, because when you get into a situation where that borrowing is going to get you into financial trouble, you're not just causing problems for the present citizens of the province, you're causing problems out about two generations. And that is way beyond what our

responsibility is here. Our responsibility is to make sure that we spend only the money that we have and that we do it in a way that's fair and reasonable.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges that comes from legislation like this is that we have also a situation where we know that the government has stepped in and taken dividends or taken funds out of the Crown corporations and taken them onto the operations side of government. And the net effect of that is to reduce the debt in the General Revenue Fund side or the operating side and push it over onto the Crown corporations.

Now we know that the result of the 1992 review was that substantial debts had to be moved back the other direction, had to be moved off of the Crowns back into the General Revenue Fund so that the Crowns could actually survive. And, Mr. Speaker, any time that you make the changes that are proposed in Bill 45 here, you're starting to limit the accountability that will prevent these further problems.

Now why raise a question around this particular bill? Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that what we're seeing is a continual erosion of the accountability structures that were put in place after the financial difficulties of the '80s. As the minister stated in his speech, he provides some rationale that talks about changing how we borrow money, but he doesn't go to why some of these restrictions were put in place at the first time.

[21:30]

And so I think that we need to recognize that these strictures or these methods of control have been developed for appropriate purposes and that we shouldn't change them without having clear parameters where the changes go because what this particular change does is it eliminates from this legislature the financial accountability around SaskTel and the Sask Telecommunications Holding Corporation.

So when we look at other pieces of legislation that are also basically giving the discretion outside of this place, we end up raising issues. Now I know for many years there are always suggestions about how we can move decisions into regulations to make them easier for the administration of a particular area. And there's some of those that make sense because there are the regulations that allow that to happen.

And I think it's quite obvious from when we were talking about the previous bill tonight about liquor control, that many of the changes that were going to be made were going to be made in the regulations and in the policy, but only 10 of the 70 changes were going to be made in the legislation. Well that's a reflection of a transfer of much of that control to the administrative structure. That may be appropriate as it relates to liquor, and I think that that's right.

But when it comes to the financial health of the province, when it comes to the buying and selling of property that's owned by SaskTel or SaskTel Holding, I think we need to be very careful about giving away that ability to control ultimately what happens, giving away that control from the legislature because no matter what happens, the financial accountability comes back to the legislature. But we can't monitor that unless we actually have the information. And this legislation is designed

in a way to effectively blunt or eliminate the reporting until an audit, maybe a year later. And I think that's just the wrong way to do it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill as I said before is only one page long, and it has these changes to *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act* and *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act*, but they are extremely important around the accountability for the finances of the province for all the reasons that I've listed.

At this point I know that other of my colleagues want to speak about this particular legislation because of their concern for the finances of the province and for financial accountability of the province as it relates to a Crown corporation. At this point I will adjourn debate on this matter.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Leader of the Opposition has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 45, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Saskatchewan Telecommunications) Amendment Act, 2012*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 46

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Krawetz that **Bill No. 46 — *The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 2012*** be now read a second time.]

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise today to enter into the debate on Bill No. 46, *An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Pension Act*. And again it seems like a relatively straightforward two-page bill but, Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue and one that I think we need to take some time to reflect on and have a lot of questions. And as I've been reading some of the comments, clearly there's more here than just a couple of pages. And so we will have a fair bit to say about this and of course questions when we get into committee.

But I think what we have to talk about . . . And really it is very interesting as my colleague, the member from Lakeview, when I was reading his notes, every section sort of has a story to tell. And it is too bad that the minister didn't go on at length because sometimes if we had a little bit more detail in the speeches that the minister gave, then we wouldn't be speculating here what could be behind this. Because some of these sections really leave one to wonder, where did this come from? What is the background to this? Why is this like this? Because we see unique features in this bill that we don't see in other pieces of legislation.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about pensions, sometimes we can disassociate with it and not think it's an important thing. But really, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's really important we take the time to think this through carefully, you

know. Because in many ways pensions are social contracts with people to ensure that if they do stop working at a time that, whether it's 65 or 60 or something like that, that they can live the remainder of their years in comfort and somebody else will have a job and that it will all work out. And this is something that's arisen over many, many years, if not centuries, of this thinking that if we put away some savings and it's held in trust, that it will be looked after and that people can retire in a fashion that hopefully will meet their needs. It may not be luxurious, depending how their lifestyle is, but that they will have their needs met.

And we see more and more, and I'll get into this, Mr. Speaker, because we read in the papers all the time about pensions having challenges and what the implications of that are and are they really a challenge or is this some sort of . . . is there something more to it.

But I do want to just reflect specifically on the bill a bit before we get into the minister's comments, you know. One, section 7, talks about:

“(9.1) Subject to subsection (6), the commission may, before the term of:

(a) the chairperson expires, appoint the chairperson for one additional term of one year; and

(b) the vice-chairperson expires, appoint the vice-chairperson for one additional term of one year”.

So that's an interesting thing that for some reason that they're feeling that they need to have that ability to extend the leadership. And what is the reason behind that? Now I don't believe, and we'll review the minister's comments, but that it doesn't really reflect on why that is the case that it seemed like . . . So there must be something behind that. And so we'll have a question: what gave rise to the idea that we need to be able to have the ability to expand the chairperson and the Chair's role for an additional year? What happened that caused the rise that we may be here tonight debating this point? And clearly there must be something there.

The other one that I do want to reflect on is the next one:

“Majority and restriction on liability

7.01(1) Subject to subsection (2), a decision or any other action taken at a meeting of the commission constitutes a decision or action of the commission if it is voted for or approved by a majority of the members of the commission present at the meeting.

Now I understand that there is five members on the board, so that would make it, could be 3 to 2. But it goes on to say:

(2) No member of the commission is liable with respect to a decision or an action taken at a meeting of the commission if:

(a) in the case of a member who was present at the meeting, the member:

- (i) did not vote for or otherwise approve the decision or action taken at the meeting; and
- (ii) requests that his or her dissent be entered into the minutes of the meeting; or
- (b) the member was not present at the meeting at which the decision was approved or action taken”.

Which is a kind of an odd one that you don't . . . I mean does that imply that those who voted for the decision have all the liability? That those who did not vote for it don't have any share of the responsibility? That's, you know, as my colleague pointed out, that this is a pretty rare kind of section, and this may in fact be maybe the only time we've seen this in legislation in Saskatchewan.

So why is it when we're talking about pensions that the liability is limited, and particularly to those who — could be only one or two members — who don't agree with a decision would have immunity? This is unusual. So clearly, clearly there must be a story behind that, as my colleague said. And I think that we'll have questions about that and would be worthwhile hearing about that. But the minister chose not to share that information, but we can only speculate. We just think it's odd. It's not a usual type of governance procedure. And we will wait for that, and we'll hear the answers why and if that's common practice, if that's now a common practice. I'm not sure.

Another one here, the next section 5. The following subsection is added after subsection 20.1(2), and it's:

“(3) At any time before the . . . death of a member, the member's spouse may revoke a waiver provided pursuant to subsection (2) by providing a written notice of the revocation in a form acceptable to the commission”.

So that's quite a thing. And so what caused rise to this? And again you know, we'll look through the minister's comments, but I don't see any rationale for that, and we'll be taking a look.

So these amendments, and there's one more talking about:

If a beneficiary is the surviving spouse of a deceased employee, the surviving spouse may, instead of receiving the amount to which the beneficiary is entitled . . . [may] make an election by providing notice to the commission . . .

And then it goes on to details.

So it's an interesting piece of legislation that actually causes rise for more questions than answers, and we're not sure if it's what the reasons are behind it. Clearly when we take a look around the country and North America, around the world, pension plans are under attack in many ways, and whether it's because of critics thinking that they're not solvent or that they really aren't, they don't have the funds for them. This is an issue that's before us.

So when we do these kind of amendments, particularly when they're so specific, it's critical, it's very critical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we get it right, that there are no unintended

consequences, that we don't do something that we regret later on. And so we will have some questions here.

But I'll take a minute here to reflect on the minister's comments that he made back on November 5th when he entered into the second round or this second reading speeches. He talks about how the municipal employees' pension plan has some 16,000 members in it and 4,000 pensioners. And it's a plan that works for employees of school divisions, urban and rural municipalities, regional colleges, regional public libraries, and other local authorities within the province. So it's really an important plan and many people count on it being there and that it will be there for them as they grow and age and will meet all their needs because that's why you put the money aside.

And he talks about the two issues really, the two key concerns of pensions really is around the solvency, that it will be there, that you can count on it. And as we've come to appreciate, that's not the case necessarily. So in other parts of Canada and in particular the other parts of North America, we think about United States, particularly where you look at California having issues in meeting ends meet there.

[21:45]

And the second key concern is really about fairness. And this one is absolutely right, that there is a balance between how you perceive the contributions of the person who's about to retire and what the implications are for those who are left in the workforce and those taxpayers to make sure the plan is solvent. It's really important that there is a level of fairness, and there is a lot of trust involved that we will look after people. And that's what happens when pension plans are used for a whole host of variety of reasons, whether they're investments, and we think of the Ontario teachers fund as a major, major investment tool in Ontario. And clearly that that's an example of how it can be used to benefit teachers or the employees in terms of making sure that they get their best return.

So we want to reflect through this, and I want to just take a minute to look at what the minister has said about this and to people at home may be interested in this and when they look back. It talks about — and it's just one or two sentences — but it talks about allowing:

. . . the commission to extend the terms of the Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson at times when leadership continuity is vital and their original terms are nearing an end. It will, for clarity purposes, modify the Act to note that a simple majority of commission members is required for all decisions made by the commission.

Well that makes sense. And it talks about:

. . . align the Act with provincial pension legislation, provide for a lifetime pension benefit to be paid to an eligible spouse where a member dies . . . it will eliminate ambiguity. The Act will be modified to clearly state that a spousal waiver to a pension benefit is revocable.

So that's all they say about the changes. And so as my colleague said a lot of the . . . When you look at the four or five

amendments, there's more to it than just one or two sentences. We have a lot of questions about that. And so when a piece of legislation is drafted to solve a problem, we have to make sure and have confidence that that problem is contained, that in fact we're not creating a situation where there will be further unintended consequences, that in fact by solving one problem you create five new ones. We have to make sure that that's a circumstance, and it would be interesting when we talk to the drafters and the minister in committee to make sure that that is actually the case.

And as I've talked about earlier, the whole issue around the leadership continuity, the idea that some members, if they're on the dissenting end of the vote, that they can actually have their votes registered, and that eliminates any liability. That's an odd thing and we've not seen that kind of thing before.

So as my colleague from Regina Lakeview said, he says and I quote, "I think we're owed a bigger explanation on that particular provision that's here." We are owed bigger explanations. We are owed more fuller, more robust explanations. And sometimes when we just get one or two lines, it leaves us thinking, what else? There must be more to this. You know, when you're talking about 16,000 pensions or 20,000 pensions, that clearly these people want answers. And they're probably watching, and they're worried about what does this really mean. And so they have questions.

I appreciate too how it is that we really need to think about this as deferred compensation. And in fact this is a way that many of us view this, and that the money that's managed by the board, that's incorporated under this legislation, is being held in trust for the employer, for the employee. Yes. And I think that we really do have to think about that. And it's a sacred trust because I think that we don't think of these people because they are not in the workforce as much. And we often see them in other circumstances, and we often think that they may be living the life of Riley, but at their early ages, when they're in their early 60s, 70s, that they do have concerns about will they have enough money when the tough . . . when it really gets going and it's tough times.

So I do appreciate what people have said about this but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a look and talk a bit about this on perhaps a larger perspective because we need to think about this in terms of the scale of issues around pensions around Canada, around the world. Because as we've gone through this baby boom time and we're now getting into the issue of who will be supporting the baby boomers, we often hear that whether it's in health care or whether it's just, as I say, in pension, this is a real problem.

And so I know that when we talk about cities wrestling with issues, I just want to take a minute and look at this article. It's from London, Ontario, and it's a description of issues around what's happening in London, Ontario. And the heading is "Municipal pension plan needs fixing." And it starts off by saying, and I quote:

London taxpayers are being hit by more than \$6 million in additional pension contributions for city workers over three years because the plan is struggling with a growing deficit.

The city was on the hook for \$20 million a year in pension contributions in 2010 for all the workers including firefighters and police.

The amount grew by over 10 per cent, grew by 2.1 million last year and will climb the same this year, about 2 million, to more than 26 million in 2013.

And so this is a big challenge for them, and it's a big hit for taxpayers. And as it's been debated that, you know, taxpayers and municipalities are faced with a lot of, lot of issues including pensions. And we hear that in our own province. But we also hear the issue about the growing infrastructure challenge and how they are facing crumbling streets, water systems, transportation systems, also the cultural and recreational deficits. These are things that we take for granted. And taxpayers are left holding the bag, and what are they going to do?

And so here we have London, Ontario talking about this. They talk about Montreal where the city's pensions contributions have rocketed to \$600 million a year from \$130 million four years ago. So \$130 million four years ago in 2008 now is some \$600 million. Clearly that's a challenge for folks, and it'll be interesting to see what Montreal comes up to do with it. It talks about St. John. Regina, here in Saskatchewan, also having serious pension trouble. And so there you go. So clearly these issues are starting to pop up across the country, and we need to make sure that we get a handle and we get in front of this.

And so when we meet with the people in committee, we will definitely be asking them questions about that because it's a real challenge. And so it will be interesting to see what kind of leadership this government provides for it. I want to take a look.

This was an article that talks about unsustainable public pensions in Ontario and what the Ontario Tory leader, Tim Hudak, would do. And this is from November 19th in the *Toronto Sun*. Hudak says, "An Ontario Tory government would consider overhauling public pensions so that new employees — and not taxpayers — bear the financial risks of their plan."

So that's where he would go. He would go with the new employees, not the taxpayers. Now that would be an interesting challenge because clearly we have to make sure that our pensions, our public pensions are sustainable. But he released a paper, Tim Hudak, a white paper on sustainable retirement security, said the combination of low interest rates, longer life expectancy, and the increased number of retirees are combining to create an unfunded liability crisis that could cause the taxpayers in Ontario as much as \$100 billion.

So he's going to take a look at how they can turn it around. And you know, it's an interesting thing here because I think this kind of plan could create more problems. He says, and I quote, "It seems whenever the government members' pension [plans] is in trouble, it's taxpayers who have to foot the bill." And then, I quote, "Taxpayers who don't have their own pensions are asked to pay more and more taxes for those who do."

So here you have that split in society between those who do have pensions and those who don't. And who pays? And particularly when it comes to public servants and municipal

employees, who will be responsible for the solvency of the plan? You know, it was a commitment and it was a deal that was signed in good faith by employees that they would have pensions, that if they put some aside, that the municipalities would do likewise. And you see, if they're not handled well, you might end up like a situation in Ontario. And if you have this continue on with the kind of plans that the Tory leader, Tim Hudak, says, you could have some real problems. You could have some real problems.

And I think that, you know . . . And it's interesting because he focuses on, Tim Hudak focuses in on the Ontario teachers' plan which he says has an unfunded liability of \$9.6 billion, which he says is a prime example of just how expensive a defined benefit plan can be for taxpayers. Now but the commitment was to these employees that there would be a pension.

So it's clear that we have to get this right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we're not sure if that's the case with the bill that's before us because we know it's a big issue. It will be interesting when we get into committee to say, have they been able to get the bell on the cat with this? Or how are Saskatchewan, how is the plan for Saskatchewan municipal employees? And so for the 20,000 people who are involved, is it going to meet their needs?

And of course, you know, the . . . And it's interesting as you read through some of the articles, and I just want to bring up one last one and it's from the *HuffPost* and it's November 20th, 2012. It talks about, "Harper and the public pension crisis: experts question severity of problem." And it talks about whether or not we really do have a question of retirement and enough money put aside and that type of thing.

But as you know, we've just had a government, a federal government who's raised the retirement age to 67, and that happened in the spring omnibus bill. And what impact that will have on people working will be interesting.

Now clearly, people who do end up working to 65 often are those . . . I mean there's a couple of different groups, one that, those who love to work and will work until they are finished, whether it's people who are in careers and find that it's meeting their needs and they want to work for as long as they can. And that's not a problem. But often there are those who are more vulnerable and those people find themselves in a situation where they have to work because they have no other choice; they don't have a pension. And so when you have the pension raised, age raised to 67, it's a tough thing because these folks, the demographics and stats show that they don't live as long. They may not even reach the age of 67, and so this is a real challenge. And so they may even have to work longer because they just don't have the funds. And of course, as . . . We've talked about this as well and we know in Saskatchewan where we have waiting lists for seniors' housing, and that seems to be a reality.

So these different ways that governments have tackled the issue of financial security for seniors is a big, big challenge. So while tonight we're debating *The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act*, it's one that has a much bigger impact on us and one that we can't just think of one little aspect. And as I said, it's the unintended consequences that we're looking for. And clearly, the four or five amendments they're putting

forward, you know, I mean seem relatively straightforward. There's two or three that we have questions about, that if it really does have the, you know . . . They're solving one problem and I hope they're not creating five more by it. And before you know it, you just sort of get into a bit of a Ponzi scheme here of solving problems, and we don't want to see that happen.

[22:00]

But we do have a lot of questions about this. And as my colleague from Lakeview said, there must be stories behind each one of them because they're so, so specific.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that many of us will want to get in and have some discussion on this bill before it gets to committee because we think it's an important one. We know folks who are in these circumstances. So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of Bill No. 46, *An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Pension Act*.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Centre has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 46. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried. I recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I move that the House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Deputy Government House Leader has moved that this House does now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:02.]

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