



FOURTH SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

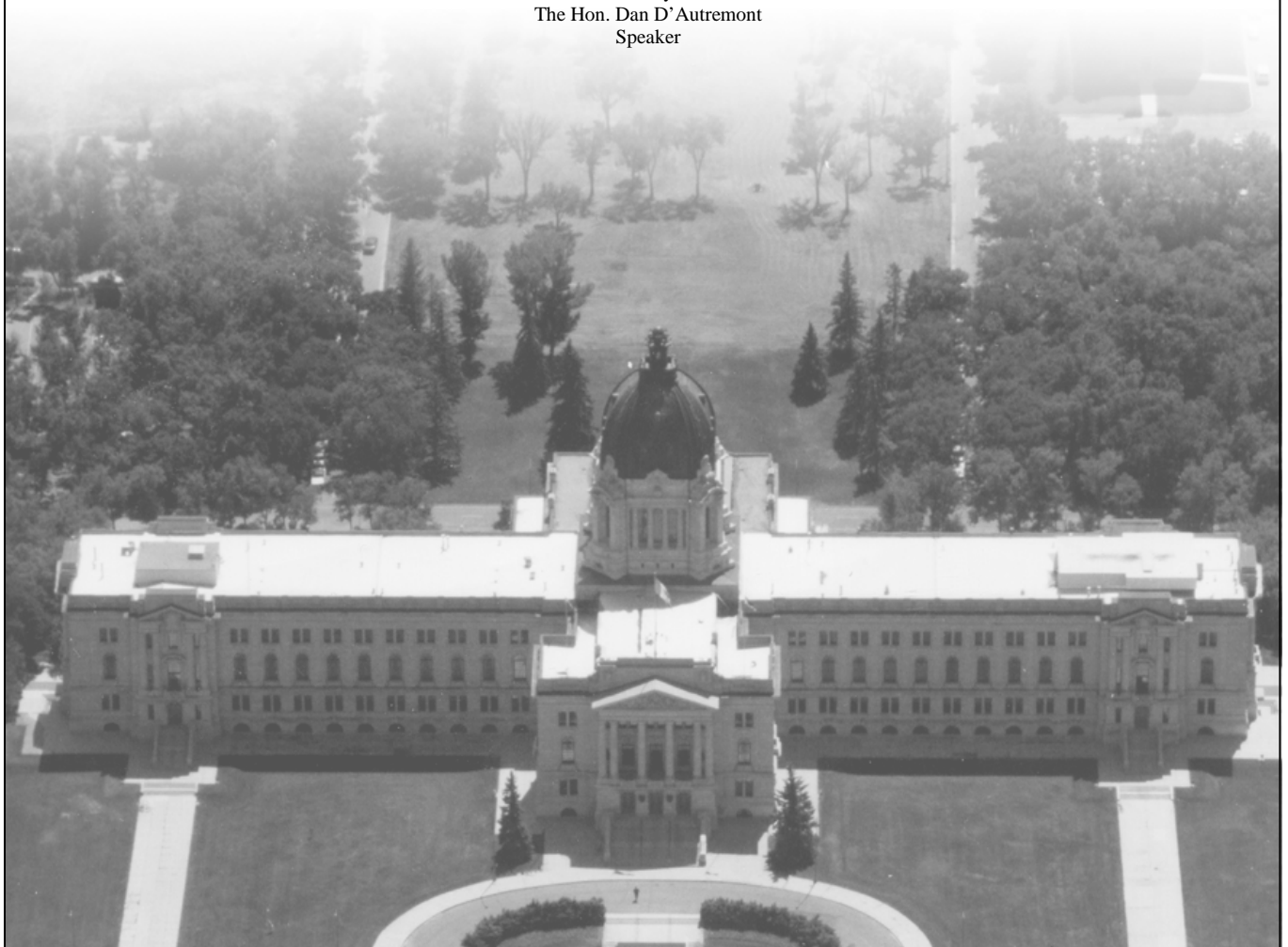
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Dan D'Autremont
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. Dan D'Autremont
 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Cam Broten

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Broten, Cam	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Campeau, Hon. Jennifer	SP	Saskatoon Fairview
Chartier, Danielle	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Cox, Herb	SP	The Battlefords
D'Autremont, Hon. Dan	SP	Cannington
Docherty, Hon. Mark	SP	Regina Coronation Park
Doherty, Hon. Kevin	SP	Regina Northeast
Doke, Larry	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Hon. Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Harpauer, Hon. Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harrison, Hon. Jeremy	SP	Meadow Lake
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Hon. Nancy	SP	Martensville
Hutchinson, Bill	SP	Regina South
Huyghebaert, D.F. (Yogi)	SP	Wood River
Jurgens, Victoria	SP	Prince Albert Northcote
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Krawetz, Hon. Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lawrence, Greg	SP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Makowsky, Gene	SP	Regina Dewdney
Marchuk, Russ	SP	Regina Douglas Park
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Paul	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Moe, Hon. Scott	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Hon. Greg	SP	Yorkton
Parent, Roger	SP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Phillips, Kevin	SP	Melfort
Reiter, Hon. Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Laura	SP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Sproule, Cathy	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Steinley, Warren	SP	Regina Walsh Acres
Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Tell, Hon. Christine	SP	Regina Wascana Plains
Tochor, Corey	SP	Saskatoon Eastview
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Vermette, Doyle	NDP	Cumberland
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Hon. Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Wyant, Hon. Gordon	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Young, Colleen	SP	Lloydminster
Vacant		Prince Albert Carlton

[The Assembly met at 10:00.]

[Prayers]

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — I'd like to table the report, in accordance with subsection 38(1) of *The Ombudsman Act, 2012*, the 2014 annual report. As well I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce to the House the Provincial Ombudsman, Mary McFadyen, sitting up in the Speaker's gallery.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with you in welcoming the Ombudsman to the Assembly today.

But in addition to that, and also in your gallery, there are a couple of guests I'd like to introduce, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to members of the House, the first guest is Eric Olason. He is currently serving on the city council in the city of Saskatoon. His involvement in that community has spanned the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority, Knights of Columbus, Prairieland Park board, Mr. Speaker. He's currently a customer service representative at Edge Transportation. He and his partner Donna have four kids.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're hoping that he is going to soon lose his employment at Edge Transportation because he is the Saskatchewan Party candidate in Saskatoon University. And we're hoping he moves from that, from the gallery to the floor, after the next election. I'd like to ask members to welcome him to his Legislative Assembly today.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, joining Eric in the gallery is Lisa Lambert. She is a four-term Catholic school board trustee, had a 30-year career at CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] in Saskatoon. She's also a director for the Saskatoon Friendship Inn, and she plays a leading role in our largest city in the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Cancer Society. Her and her husband, Jim, have three daughters and they also have two granddaughters, Mr. Speaker. And we're also very hopeful that her career will transition soon, in about a year, to the floor of the Legislative Assembly as she is running in the constituency of Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood for the Saskatchewan Party. I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming these individuals who have stepped forward to get involved in the public life of the province.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . oh sorry. I'm Saskatoon Centre. I know that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I'd like to welcome the guests from Saskatoon. But, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the rest of the House, there are three young

activists I'd like to introduce in the east gallery: Matt Lensen, Kent Peterson, Paige Kezima. They've been in the House many times before. They're strong activists, not only for labour but also for human rights. I ask all members to join with me in welcoming them to their legislature. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this honourable Assembly, two visitors to Saskatchewan seated with my wife, Linda, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, who are tireless advocates for people living with a rare disorder called — and now this is the hard part — phenylketonuria or simply, as we call it, PKU.

PKU is a rare genetic disorder which is not life-threatening, but is a threat to the brain. Every bite of food and sip of liquid is potentially a threat if it contains protein. People living with PKU must maintain probably the strictest diet known to medicine and eliminate almost all forms of natural protein and frequently take a medical food substitute. Happily since the 1960s, every baby born in our province is tested for PKU on the second day of life. We test 12,000 babies to find just one with PKU. We do this to prevent severe intellectual disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery are Mr. John Adams from Ontario, who is president of the Canadian PKU non-profit and has an adult son with PKU. Mr. Adams is also Chair of the board of the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders. And Mrs. Nicole Pallone of British Columbia is vice-president of CanPKU [Canadian PKU and Allied Disorders Inc.] association and has a young daughter with PKU.

Two other guests that were to join us today but were unable to attend are Heather Garton of Saskatoon, leader of Saskatchewan PKU network, and also Dr. Dawn Danielson, specialist in metabolic disorders such as PKU. Dr. Danielson was born in Saskatoon, left with her family at an early age, took her medical degree in Winnipeg and advanced training in Calgary. She's returned to her birthplace recently, and we welcome her back especially as she is the first metabolic doctor to live in our province for 15 years.

Mr. Speaker, I know all members of this House will be interested to learn the outcome of our guests meeting with our Health minister later today, I believe. Let us all give a cordial Saskatchewan welcome to these distinguished patient advocates.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Docherty: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, it's with great pleasure I'd like to introduce a group of students sitting in the west gallery from the Huda School, and I've had many opportunities to go to the Huda School. Accompanying them today are Ms. Melissa Mah — just give a wave — and Ms. Sandra Jost, and Ms. Diane Szabo.

Again, I've had many opportunities to visit with the students, and I'm looking forward to having an opportunity to spend

some time with them and get stumped as I do every single year and again. So I'm looking forward to the questions, and I'd like all the members to join me in welcoming them to their Assembly.

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

Mr. Lawrence: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce to you Mr. Clayton Finnell from Moose Jaw, a fine young man of 1,000-good-deeds fame from our fair city of Moose Jaw. And in a few minutes I'll have a few more words to say about him in a member's statement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed in the west gallery a group of students have just joined us from Grenfell High. We have 20 grade 8 students. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Ann Dusterbeck, and parent chaperone, Ms. Tatum Duryba. I welcome the students to this Legislative Assembly and invite the members to join me in extending that welcome.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition calling for support for better schools here in Saskatchewan. We know that far too many of our classrooms are overcrowded, under-resourced, and that the Sask Party have eliminated hundreds of educational assistant positions; and that the condition of many of our schools are rundown, unsafe, or uninspected, and this government refuses to release information on the \$1.5 billion of known repairs that are needed in our schools; and that none of this is acceptable given the record revenues this government has had over the last eight years.

I'd like to read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan call on this government to immediately stop ignoring schools and start prioritizing students by capping classroom sizes, increasing support for students, and developing a transparent plan to build and repair our schools.

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

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise once again today to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens as it relates to the unsafe conditions created by this government on Dewdney Avenue, and their failure to act to ensure safety, Mr. Speaker. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your

honourable Legislative Assembly call on the provincial government to immediately take action as it relates to the unacceptable danger, disturbance, and infrastructure damage caused by the heavy-haul truck traffic on Dewdney Avenue west of the city centre to ensure the safety and well-being of communities, families, residents, and users; and that those actions and plans should include rerouting the heavy-haul truck traffic, receive provincial funding, and be developed through consultation with the city of Regina, communities, and residents.

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

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

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition again today in support of safe staffing levels in long-term care. The petitioners point out that many aspects of long-term care are deteriorating under this government. They point out that this government of Saskatchewan needs to actually recognize the need for safe staffing levels to provide hands-on care to residents. The petitioners also point out that this government has removed the regulations requiring a minimum standard of care for seniors, which has resulted in neglect. And they also point out that chronic understaffing in long-term care facilities results in unacceptable conditions, including unanswered calls for help, infrequent bathing, and a rise in physical violence amongst residents. I'd like to read the prayer:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the government to commit to the creation of safe staffing levels for all valued members of the health care team and to reintroduce actual numbers of staff to match the level of care needs and the number of residents under their care in long-term care facilities.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens of Saskatoon. I so submit.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to present a petition in support of retaining Yarrow Youth Farm. The individuals who have signed this petition want to point out the following: that Saskatchewan currently has a variety of options to house youth offenders according to the assessed level of risk to their communities. Saskatoon had Yarrow Youth Farm, a facility for low-risk teens who benefit from an open-custody home with a caring, supportive environment, with programs to help residents live more productive lives. Saskatoon also has Kilburn Hall, a secure custody unit for youth considered a greater risk to their communities. The government closed Yarrow Youth Farm and created an open custody wing in

Kilburn Hall to accommodate Yarrow's residents.

Now the provincial Advocate for Children and Youth has declared he cannot endorse such a rationalization, as low-risk teens could be influenced and pressured by close proximity to high-risk youth who may be involved in serious crimes or gangs. Kilburn Hall is a more institutional environment that could intimidate and alienate teens that have committed minor offences. Here's the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

They respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan take the following action: to cause the government to keep Yarrow Youth Farm open to ensure a caring home environment for youth who have committed minor offences and provide support to help these young people redirect their lives by setting more positive goals.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by a number of individuals from Saskatoon. I so submit.

TABLE OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — I inadvertently tabled two reports this morning, so I should comment that the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner annual report 2014 was also tabled in accordance with section 23 of *The Public Interest Disclosure Act*. It's on the flip side of the Ombudsman's report, so you have it; you have received it already, just got to flip your book over.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Yom HaShoah

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, today is Yom HaZikaron laShoah ve-la G'vurah, which we recognize in Saskatchewan as Holocaust Memorial Day. Yom HaShoah is Hebrew for day of catastrophe, and it's hard to imagine how there could have been any greater catastrophe than the Holocaust, with the senseless murder of 6 million Jews standing as one of the worst atrocities in human history.

But, Mr. Speaker, Gevurah, the Hebrew word for strength, is also an important part of this solemn occasion. It's a reminder of those who did not go quietly but fought against the Nazis to protect their lives and the lives of their families. In the face of overwhelming odds, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto stood up to the Nazis and fought back. It was to in part commemorate that astonishing act of strength and heroism that the 27th day in the month of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar was chosen for Yom HaShoah.

We remember those that perished. We remember those that resisted and those that survived. And on Yom HaShoah, we seek to honour them all.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my privilege to stand in silence and remembrance as the sirens wailed across the state of Israel to mark Yom HaShoah. I have stood in awe at the unbelievably

powerful memorials at Yad va Shem and at Ha Beit Lohamei Haghetaot, at the Ghetto Fighters House Museum, and I always remember the sense of sadness and inspiration, of horror and courage that each of these memorials impart.

I know that all members will join me today in reflecting upon the legacy of the Holocaust. May we all do our part to learn the lessons of Yom HaZikaron laShoah ve-la G'vurah.

[10:15]

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

Documentary Commemorates Holocaust

Mr. Norris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, along with other elected representatives, including the member from Nutana and Saskatoon city councillor Eric Olason, I had the privilege last Sunday, a sobering honour really, of attending the screening of the Holocaust documentary *Numbered* at the Roxy Theatre in Saskatoon.

This haunting documentary depicts how Auschwitz prisoners were tattooed with serial numbers. The screening was organized by members of Saskatoon's Congregation Shir Chadash and its Holocaust committee and began with a memorial service to honour those who lost their lives in this terrible, horrific, brutal Nazi endeavour. Special recognition goes to the congregation's president, Mary Melnychuk, who helped organize the event.

All of those attending were noticeably moved by the disquieting story of those who experienced the horror of the Holocaust and how we must never forget those who perished and those who persist in demonstrating their courage, those who have endured, survived, and now have the courage to share their stories. Their stories resonate so powerfully today, this being Holocaust Remembrance Day.

About 400,000 people were tattooed in the death camp of Auschwitz and its sub-camps. Today there remain only about 4,000 with these sickening markings. As the population of these survivors declines with age, the film told of a movement in Israel and elsewhere that has the grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors tattooing their grandparents' numbers so that their memories and stories live on.

Mr. Speaker, this documentary is important to mark and remember in history, especially in light of current circumstances around the world, to make sure that the world never experiences this type of horror again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Equality Day

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination [and in particular without discrimination] based on race, national or ethnic origin,

colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Mr. Speaker, that's the text of section 15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and tomorrow marks the 34th anniversary of this section coming into force. This anniversary is marked all across Canada as Equality Day. Numerous important cases have been fought and won all the way to the Supreme Court that has expanded these provisions to include the unemployed, pregnant women, and the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] community.

This section of the Charter is so important, Mr. Speaker, but there's still so much more that needs to be done before we can have real equality for all people in our province. We know that women still earn less than men do in the workplace and are under-represented on our corporate boards and places like this Assembly. First Nations students still receive far less funding than their provincial counterparts, and newcomers all across our province still face racism and discrimination in many places.

We've come a long way, Mr. Speaker, but we've got so much more to do to fight for equality in Saskatchewan. I ask all members to join me in recognizing this important milestone for human rights, but also to commit to making every day equality day and to fight for the right and dignity of all people in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

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

Moose Jaw Resident Performs Good Deeds

Mr. Lawrence: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize a truly outstanding citizen of Moose Jaw. Clayton Finnell has performed, so far, more than 300 acts of kindness in the past six months. In October of last year, Clayton set out on a mission to complete 1,000 good deeds as a way to try and bring back a sense of community which he sees slipping away. Mr. Speaker, in his own words, Clayton says that he is doing 1,000 good deeds "to show the world that no matter what, there is always something you can do to care for people you don't even know."

Some of the smaller deeds he's performed include placing flowers on the windshield of cars at a little boy's funeral and dropping off bananas, apples, and oranges at seniors' homes. One of the larger, more challenging deeds involved recruiting volunteers to help build a 30 by 15 rainbow out of snow for a little girl who suffers from a rare disease and collects rainbows.

Mr. Speaker, people and businesses in Moose Jaw recently came together to surprise Clayton with a date night package for himself and his wife as a way to thank Clayton for his selflessness. Always thinking of others, Clayton, while he's in Regina today, plans to do some good deeds.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking Clayton for all he does for Moose Jaw and area.

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

Realtors' Quality of Life Gala

Ms. Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I had the opportunity to bring greetings at the Association of Saskatchewan Realtors' third annual Quality of Life Gala. Mr. Speaker, at this event I was joined by my colleagues from Regina Douglas Park, The Battlefords — a former realtor himself — and the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Although this gala provides a great opportunity for realtors from across Saskatchewan to network, the main feature of this evening is the presentation of six \$5,000 grants to a selected charity in each of the six regions across the province. This year's recipients were Yorkton's Women in Need, Shelwin House; the Moose Jaw Riverside Mission; The Battlefords and Area Sexual Assault Centre; Prince Albert Rose Garden Hospice Association; and Saskatoon's Crisis Nursery and the Regina Sexual Assault Centre.

The ASR [Association of Saskatchewan Realtors] also recognizes the contribution of their own members, as the Distinguished Realtor Award and the New Realtor of the Year were given out that evening.

Mr. Speaker, all monies donated were from the ASR Quality of Life Fund. The Association of Regina Realtors have what we all want. They want to have a province that is the best place to live, work, and raise a family. I would ask all members to join me in congratulating the Saskatchewan Association of Realtors for another successful gala as well as thank the Quality of Life recipients for the excellent work they do right within each one of their communities. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Emergency Telecommunicators Week

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize that our government has proclaimed this week, April 12th to 18th, as Emergency Telecommunicators Week in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan joins the rest of Canada to commend the work being done by all of our 911 operators and dispatchers. They are our unsung heroes.

Last year in our province they took more than 300,000 calls, calls from people often facing the most difficult times of their lives. They not only have the technical skills and expertise but also the compassion and composure to do what it takes to stay with a caller online during a traumatic time, helping them stay calm, and to assure them that help is on the way all while dispatching lifesaving personnel and equipment. Their work with police, firefighting, rescue, and emergency medical services saves lives.

Mr. Speaker, last evening I had the pleasure of attending the 13th annual Telecommunicator of the Year Awards Banquet. I would like to extend our congratulations to this year's honourees. The dedication of all emergency telecommunicators and emergency services personnel keeps Saskatchewan safe and strong.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in thanking all of our emergency telecommunicators for the work they do each

day.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Promoting Saskatchewan Outside of our Borders

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there was a time when the government in this province made no effort to promote Saskatchewan outside of our borders because they felt we had little to offer the rest of the world. Thankfully those days and that government are long gone. The editorial in today's *StarPhoenix* states that the following, and I quote:

Saskatchewan has come a long way from the days when a former premier refused to join a trade mission . . . because he considered the entire Asia region to hold little positive impact on this province or its economy.

Mr. Speaker, last year Saskatchewan's exports to India totalled nearly \$1.2 billion, the largest in Canada by far, and now for the first time in 40 years we will be selling Saskatchewan uranium to India, \$345 million worth over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, *The StarPhoenix* editorial goes on to say that this historic deal, and I quote, ". . . marks the culmination of laudable efforts by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Premier Brad Wall to restore uranium sales to India." And I continue with the quote, Mr. Speaker: "Mr. Wall's trade visits to the country in 2011 and 2014 . . . [without a doubt] had a great bearing on Wednesday's announcement . . ."

Mr. Speaker, we've come a long way from the days when the government believed Saskatchewan had little to offer other parts of the world. It's amazing what can happen when you have a province with so much to offer and a government, a Premier, and Saskatchewan exporters who believe in Saskatchewan.

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Ambulance Service Fees

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, Darrell Meck lives in Stockholm. He's on a limited pension, and he's had to deal with several big ambulance bills in the range of \$1,200. Darrell writes this: "I have no choice but to refuse any future ambulance service because I flat out cannot afford it." He also writes, "All I know is, should I require ambulance again, I definitely am refusing and will choose death over financial hardship." What does the Premier have to say to Darrell today?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would say that certainly we'd encourage anybody to use an ambulance regardless, Mr. Speaker, of what the bill would be after the ambulance has delivered services to the individual. Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that people in this province have access to emergency services, to acute care services. What our health regions will do, what ambulance operators will do, they

will work with each individual client, Mr. Speaker, based on the individual's needs and circumstances.

With respect to the inability to pay, Mr. Speaker, we do have supplementary health benefits that do provide some additional support for those people that are low income. I don't know first-hand; I'm not familiar with this individual's case. Certainly my office would be very happy to follow up to see whether or not this gentleman actually does apply for additional benefits.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, in past days we've heard from individuals who have contacted the minister's office and not received the help that they needed. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, is that Darrell is not alone. He writes, "I've heard many other people talk about this and worry about ever needing an ambulance with their minimal income." And we know, Mr. Speaker, from a recent investigation, almost half of Saskatchewan's population would delay calling an ambulance because of the massive fees. Mr. Speaker, that is alarming. My question to the Premier: how can he possibly dismiss this?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't have this individual's particular circumstances at hand, but my office would be happy to look into this particular case. If Darrell is an individual of low income, Mr. Speaker, there is the supplementary health and family health benefits that do provide support for individuals that are low income. I would certainly hope, Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition has spoken or his staff has spoken to this individual, that they'd at least refer this individual to these programs to see whether or not his ambulance fees actually would be covered by the province through these types of programs, Mr. Speaker, rather than just let this individual think that the fees wouldn't be covered. I don't know the specifics of the case, Mr. Speaker, but we'd certainly be happy to reach out to Darrell if the Leader of the Opposition would provide that information.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, we have seen the treatment that members of the public have received when they've come to the legislature with concerns around ambulance fees. And I just asked the Premier, Mr. Speaker, how it is not concerning that nearly half of the province's population say they would delay calling an ambulance because of the fees associated with that.

Mr. Speaker, we know Dave Carr came to the legislature because of the massive bills for his late wife, Catherine. Sara Bucsis-Gunn spoke out about the massive ambulance bills for her now-deceased daughter, Leandra. Calvin Vollet came to the legislature yesterday to raise concerns about the massive bills that he has had to deal with, and now Darrell Meck is speaking out about his massive ambulance fees. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has the worst ambulance fees in the country, and that needs to change.

My question to the Premier: how many people need to come forward with their concerns and with their stories of hardship before he will recognize that this is a major problem and it

needs to be fixed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, this year our government will pay \$85 million towards the cost of providing ambulances for the people of this province, all across the province, Mr. Speaker. This represents about 71 per cent of the total cost of ambulance services, Mr. Speaker. As well, the money that we have budgeted in our regional health authorities to either contract through private operators or to provide a region-run service, Mr. Speaker, that's up 50 per cent from the time that the members opposite were the government. Where they provided \$49 million in funding for regions, we now provide, Mr. Speaker, just under \$75 million in those seven years increase.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure of the specifics of Darrell's case. If the Leader of the Opposition though hasn't referred Darrell to the Ministry of Health to determine whether or not Darrell is eligible for supplementary and family health benefits, Mr. Speaker, if he hasn't done that, my office would be more than happy to offer that service to determine whether or not Darrell's fees actually would be covered.

[10:30]

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, Sara Bucsis-Gunn still owed \$7,000 for ambulance service when her seven-year-old daughter, Leandra, died. Sara says, Mr. Speaker, that she spoke to the Rural Health minister by phone on March 25th, and that minister talked about how she could've perhaps followed other families' examples and had some steak night fundraisers to cover the massive ambulance costs for her little girl. Mr. Speaker, she recorded that phone call and shared it with us because she was so horribly disappointed by that minister's dismissive approach — steak night fundraisers.

We have the worst ambulance fees in the country, Mr. Speaker, and this government's response is to talk about steak night fundraisers and charity. Does the Premier understand why Sara is so horribly disappointed by that conversation?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Again, Mr. Speaker, we know that regional health authorities and operators will work with individuals, with their clients, Mr. Speaker, to make arrangements when it comes to paying these fees. We also know in this province, as other provinces have to make those decisions, Mr. Speaker, ambulance fees are not an insured benefit under the *Canada Health Act*, but we choose to heavily subsidize ambulance fees, as do other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to make decisions when it comes to other non-insured services under the *Canada Health Act*, and I spoke about that yesterday. For example, Saskatchewan has one of the best records when it comes to our drug plan, particularly our cancer drug plan, Mr. Speaker. This government has provided funding and approvals for over 40 new cancer drugs in the last seven years, Mr. Speaker. We also provide funding for

things like anti-nausea medication for those people that are undergoing things like chemotherapy — not covered by every single province, Mr. Speaker.

These are the decisions that we have to make when it comes to the non-insured services, but we will continue to heavily subsidize road ambulances in this province. And we'll also continue to provide over \$10 million each and every year for STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society] so that we have that emergency support, no matter where you live in this province.

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

Mr. Broten: — No response from the Premier about whether or not it's responsible and appropriate for the minister to address a grieving mother who lost her daughter, faced with a \$7,000 ambulance bill, Mr. Speaker, whether turning to charity is the solution.

Clearly with the families and the individuals who have come forward, it's clearly shown that this government's approach to ambulance fees is not working, that the system is broken, and it needs to be fixed. This government needs to take it seriously.

This government commissioned a review of the ambulance system a few years ago, but it has largely ignored those recommendations. We've heard repeatedly about the massive ambulance bills. We've heard about the sky-high interest fees, and we've heard about the practice of double billing for the same trip. Now we've heard from Darrell Meck, and Darrell says this: "I have no choice but to refuse any future ambulance service because I flat out cannot afford it." And then the only tangible solutions that this government brings forward, Mr. Speaker, is to talk about steak night fundraisers and charities. That's the type of response that people have experienced when they come to the legislature with their stories of hardship and their stories of suffering, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Premier: can we expect any action from his government whatsoever on this issue of ambulance fees, or will the Premier, is he content to keep stubbornly dismissing the concerns that Saskatchewan patients are bringing to this legislature?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the tangible that we can offer Darrell, which apparently the Leader of the Opposition hasn't offered him, is to see whether or not he's actually a beneficiary under the supplementary health and family health benefits, Mr. Speaker. We will offer that service to Darrell, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to put us in contact or in fact, Mr. Speaker, I'll offer the Leader of the Opposition the contact information that he could provide to Darrell to see whether or not he would be eligible for that.

Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that in some of the policies that have been put in place, there were regulations that were changed back in the late 1980s, regulations that in fact the members opposite campaigned on, the member from Lakeview, the member from Athabasca campaigned on to make changes in 1999, Mr. Speaker. They never made those changes.

Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing some of those policies to determine whether or not the circumstances that were in place in 1988 and 1989 are applicable today, and we are undergoing that work right now. But what we're going to continue to do, Mr. Speaker, is continue to invest record amounts into our infrastructure, into the services that we're providing, the operational dollars that we're providing, including the heavily subsidized ambulance services in this province.

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

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, Darrell had all of the information, and it was provided. My question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Is it his position that Saskatchewan families should have to rely on steak night fundraisers in order to cover ambulance fees, yes or no?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said before, nearly 71 per cent of ambulance fees services, the cost to run ambulances in this province, are borne by the taxpayers of this province. Mr. Speaker, that equates to about \$85 million this year, Mr. Speaker, of an overall total budget of \$120 million to provide EMS [emergency medical services] services, ground EMS services. That doesn't include the \$10 million, Mr. Speaker, that we provide for STARS each and every year. It doesn't include the air ambulance as well that we provide as a service to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, what we're going to continue to do is ensure that we do continue heavily subsidized road ambulance service in this province. We're going to also continue to provide record dollars to the regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they provide the services, whether it be road ambulance, whether it be acute care, long-term care, primary health care, mental health and addition services. That's the record on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite said a lot of things when they were in the government. They didn't get a lot achieved, Mr. Speaker. I can understand why they're frustrated at that, Mr. Speaker, but we're making improvements each and every day in health care.

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

Design of Moose Jaw Hospital

Ms. Chartier: — Can either of the Health ministers please explain why this government has cut the number of beds in the existing Moose Jaw Union Hospital?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the great news is that the new Moose Jaw Hospital is going to be open later this year after a long time of people in the Moose Jaw area and Five Hills Health Region wondering when they're going to get a new hospital, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite had representation from Moose Jaw for many, many years in this House, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, when they had the opportunity to make some of those decisions and they never

did, Mr. Speaker. So we're getting that done.

Mr. Speaker, as members opposite will know, we're moving toward a different type of layout in terms of that new hospital, Mr. Speaker. What they want to do is prepare to ensure that not only the staff but also the patients and the providers have an opportunity to make that transition as seamless as possible, Mr. Speaker. What the concept is is ensuring that we are being as efficient as possible, Mr. Speaker, in that hospital. And so they want to make that transition as seamless as possible, and that's why they are making that move now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Saskatoon Riversdale.

Ms. Chartier: — We know that the new Moose Jaw Hospital is going to be smaller and have fewer beds, and it won't even have the hyperbaric chamber, all because this government let its \$40 million American lean consultants shrink the size of the hospital. But many Moose Jaw residents don't know that this government has already cut the number of beds in the existing Moose Jaw Hospital. How can the Health minister justify this?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well as was announced when the Moose Jaw Hospital was announced in the design process, what we want to move to is, instead of having shuffling around, moving around our patients from one room to the next, Mr. Speaker, the design is so that we're going to move the services to the patient instead of having the patient move all around the hospital. That's going to ensure a more efficient design for that hospital, Mr. Speaker. And it makes sense in the months leading to the transition to that new hospital that we're actually putting in place the processes in the existing hospital so that it's a seamless transition.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that this is what the concept has been met with:

It's a new concept with a lot of detail and discussion going into the layout and the flow of traffic through the hospital. What we're seeing here is a renewal of health and the delivery of health to the citizens of Moose Jaw. It's a pretty exciting time to see this new concept taking hold . . .

That's Deb Higgins, the mayor of Moose Jaw.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Speaker, this government has already cut the number of . . . [inaudible interjections] . . . Maybe they should listen to the question, Mr. Speaker. Maybe they should listen to the question. This government has already cut the number of medicine beds in the existing Moose Jaw Hospital by almost 40 per cent, and in the last eight months that are reported up until February, the medicine ward at Moose Jaw Hospital has been overcapacity. When you slash the number of beds and then have eight months in a row of being overcapacity, that sounds like poor planning and reckless decision making to me. We've even heard of seniors being placed in pediatric beds because that is the only space for them. To the minister: how does that make any sense?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Mr. Speaker, I can go on. It's a quote:

The "patient-friendly" hospital is being built using lean principles and will incorporate flexible care whereby required services will come to patients rather than having patients moved unnecessarily throughout the hospital . . .

Again that was Deb Higgins, the mayor of Moose Jaw just last year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the new hospital will feature a new patient-focused model of care where admitted patients remain in the same in-patient room throughout their time in the hospital. Instead of being shuffled around from room to room to room, Mr. Speaker, we're going to ensure that the services move to the patient, not the other way around.

Mr. Speaker, the new model of care, processes will be improved so that the nurses will actually be able to spend more time with the patients in the room. For example, all patient rooms will have supplies a nurse needs to care for the patients. Nurses will no longer have to walk away from their patients to get supplies, thus creating more time directly with the patient, Mr. Speaker. This is a more efficient way to deliver health services, and it makes sense to move, to transition in the existing hospital, so the staff and the patients and the providers are prepared for it on the day when the brand new hospital opens up later this year in Moose Jaw.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Is it the Health minister's contention that being overcapacity and planning to be overcapacity is a good idea, Mr. Speaker? The Health minister should look at the numbers. The government has slashed the number of beds in the medicine ward in the existing Moose Jaw Hospital, and the medicine ward is now consistently overcapacity.

This is all part of the government's strategic plan for this hospital. The strategic plan talks about shrinking the existing hospital to fit into the new smaller hospital, and the government documents talk about a plan to discharge patients more quickly, to rush them out the door in order to make do with fewer beds and less staff. To the minister: How does this make any sense?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — If you want to talk about slashing health care, Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about slashing health care, let's go to 52 communities across this province that saw what that looked like under the NDP [New Democratic Party], or let's jump in the Leader of the Opposition's van and we'll head down Wascana Parkway and we'll see what it looks like to slash health care in the capital city.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the new hospital in Moose Jaw, it's going from 121 beds to 115 beds, but it's going to put more focus on ensuring that we have outpatient service, that we have better primary health care in Moose Jaw. Moose Jaw is one of our primary health care innovation sites, Mr. Speaker, and

they're doing some great work around extending their hours and ensuring that they're providing better services.

Mr. Speaker, the new Moose Jaw Hospital . . . which members opposite, I know they don't like this, but they had time, they had years to plan, to announce a new hospital in Moose Jaw when they had representation on this side of the House. It never happened, Mr. Speaker. But what it also is going to include is another fixed MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] for the people of southern Saskatchewan, for the people in Moose Jaw, thanks to the generosity of the foundation, Mr. Speaker, and people that want to see services like an MRI in that community. Mr. Speaker, this is a great project for the city, and you only have to ask the mayor about that.

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

Canadian Wheat Board Ownership

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, the federal government has handed the Canadian Wheat Board to a US [United States] agri-food giant and a state-owned company from Saudi Arabia. An incredible valuable organization that was publicly owned and farmer controlled is now foreign owned and Saudi controlled. Stewart Wells who is a farmer-elected Canadian Wheat Board director calls this the ". . . biggest transfer of wealth away from farmers in the history of the country," and farmers weren't consulted about this deal at all. Was the Agriculture minister consulted? And what did he tell Minister Ritz on behalf of Saskatchewan producers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that question. The Canadian Wheat Board and federal government announced the sale of 50.1 per cent interest in CWB [Canadian Wheat Board] to G3 Global Grain Group for \$250 million yesterday, Mr. Speaker. The other 49.9 per cent will be kept in trust for farmers who deliver grain to the board. Any farmer who does deliver will get a \$5 per tonne equity in the organization. In seven years, G3 Global Grain Group has the option to buy back the shares from farmers at market value.

[10:45]

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, we thank the minister for reading Mr. Ritz's news release, but I asked him the question whether he was consulted or not by Mr. Ritz. The controlling shares, as the minister said, are valued at about \$250 million, but no dollars are changing hands. This multinational is not paying a cent for this company. This is a handover to a US agri-food giant and a Saudi-owned, state-owned agricultural investment firm.

That amount, by the way, is close to the amount that was left in the contingency fund which should have been distributed to farmers. But, Mr. Speaker, we can't find out any details about that because Gerry Ritz has veiled the CWB books in a cloak of

secrecy. Does the Agriculture minister know anything about these books, and does he support this federal cloak of secrecy?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know where the member gets her information, and I discount it accordingly. This investment ensures the new company will be well capitalized and will be a competitive force in the grain industry globally.

We appreciate that Canadian farmers will also have the opportunity to own equity in the new company through the farmer equity plan, Mr. Speaker. I think that this is generally a good thing for farmers in Western Canada, and it will increase the global penetration of our grain marketing system in Western Canada.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, the minister should know the offer made to the farmers is shares in a trust fund. It's not equity at all; it's just shares in a trust fund. He should check his facts.

The other night in committee, the minister said it made sense to sell the assets of Livestock Services of Saskatchewan Corporation to agricultural producers. The minister said:

The assets were purchased by the industry through the revolving fund so, in the event of a default or abandonment of the contract, I think it would make sense that the assets go back to the industry.

They're public assets and their sales should benefit the producers who relied on them, end quote. They're public assets and their sales should benefit the producers who relied on them. To the minister: why doesn't the same logic apply to the Canadian Wheat Board assets?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the members on the opposite side of the floor live in the past, in a time when certain commodities from Western Canada were under the control of a federal government agency called the Canadian Wheat Board. Mr. Speaker, we've moved on. G3, the new company, is a joint venture between Bunge Canada and SALIC [Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Company] Canada.

Farmers will benefit from this deal by having another major company with global market penetration, Mr. Speaker, which cannot be said for the Canadian Wheat Board in its current form. Canadian farmers will also have the opportunity to own equity in the Wheat Board through the farmer equity plan and, Mr. Speaker, they will have an opportunity to capitalize that equity in seven years.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, this government can't have it both ways. What part of his own position doesn't he understand? In committee the minister said:

The assets were purchased by the industry through the revolving fund so, in the event of a default or abandonment of the contract, I think it would make sense that the assets would go back to the industry.

They're public assets and their sales should benefit the producers who relied on them. So it's one standard when it comes to livestock producers but a totally different approach when it comes to grain producers. To the minister: how can he possibly stand in his place and fully support the actions of Gerry Ritz?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wheat Board debate is over. Now it's about global penetration of markets for our commodities, Mr. Speaker, and this company will be an improvement over what existed before in Western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Jim Wickett, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, had this to say. You know, he said in an answer to a question, to Jim Smalley, he said:

You know, that is not a big concern for me. We live in a global economy now, and it doesn't matter. You know, the same farmer that, you know, might be mad about that is going to drive a John Deere combine or a Case tractor, and they are not owned by Canadian . . .

This is a global company, Mr. Speaker. It's a global economy. We export the vast majority of what we produce in Western Canada in terms of commodities, and global market penetration is key to our success.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, we know that two years ago, in the second-last crop year, farmers lost \$3.3 billion because of the grain companies. Last year, in the last crop year, they're likely to lose \$2 billion. And this is because of studies that have been done. The minister knows that's the case. Adding one more multinational with a Saudi state-owned corporation who is only interested in their own country's food sovereignty is not the answer.

What we want to know and we asked earlier, Mr. Speaker, is this question: was this minister consulted by the Agriculture minister for Canada, and what did he say on behalf of Saskatchewan producers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, the preamble to that question is simply not true. It's not true. It's information that the members opposite don't have enough agricultural background to refute. It's absolutely ridiculous. It's bad for business in Western Canada, Mr. Speaker, and it would be

extremely bad for farming business in Western Canada if those members ever became the Government of Saskatchewan again. I predict that won't happen.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 611 — *The Student Bill of Rights Act, 2015*

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 611, *The Student Bill of Rights Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The member for Saskatoon Centre has moved first reading of Bill No. 611, *The Student Bill of Rights Act, 2015*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

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

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

Mr. Forbes: — Next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — I recognize the chairman of the Standing Committee on Human Services.

Standing Committee on Human Services

Mr. Lawrence: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Human Services to report Bill No. 143, *The Degree Authorization Amendment Act, 2014* without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this bill be heard in Committee of the Whole? No, just wait. I'm on the wrong page. When shall this bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

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

The Speaker: — The Minister of Advanced Education has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 143, *The Degree Authorization Amendment Act, 2014*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 143 — *The Degree Authorization Amendment Act, 2014*

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

The Speaker: — The minister has moved that Bill No. 143, *The Degree Authorization Amendment Act, 2014* be now read the third time and passed under its title.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask for leave of the Assembly to introduce a motion regarding wheelchairs at the Assembly.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has asked for leave to make a motion regarding wheelchairs in the Assembly. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

MOTIONS

Wheelchairs in the Assembly

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. By leave of the Assembly, I move:

That the application of rule 49 and any other practice may be relaxed by the Speaker on the sitting day 52, April 22nd, 2015, in order to permit the full participation in proceedings of any member seated in a wheelchair for the purpose of participating in Wheelchairs at the Assembly Day.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has moved, by leave:

That the application of rule 49 and any other practice may be relaxed by the Speaker on sitting day 52, April 22nd, 2015, in order to permit the full participation in proceedings of any member seated in a wheelchair for the purpose of participating in Wheelchairs at the Assembly.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

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

Government Practices and the Income Tax System

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to stand in the Assembly today to talk about the motion. I'll read the motion at the beginning of my speech and then at the end of my speech, Mr. Speaker. And the motion reads:

That this Assembly supports the government's initiative to save Saskatchewan families an estimated \$10.6 million in 2015 through the indexation of the provincial income tax system, which keeps taxes low and brings young families to Saskatchewan by making life more affordable.

So, Mr. Speaker, I guess what I want to start off with is talking about families. As a father of four, obviously my children are the most important thing to me. And what I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is what had happened a little bit in the past and what is happening now.

What has happened in the past is, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately myself, as well as many other colleagues on this House, saw people leaving Saskatchewan in droves. From 1999 right up until 2007, they were leaving in droves . . . or sorry, from 2003 up till 2007. They were leaving in droves, Mr. Speaker. They were walking out the door. They were leaving Saskatchewan behind because of what we had talked about earlier here in the debate on the Assembly floor, is that the previous government didn't want to have Saskatchewan expanded. They didn't want to look at what Saskatchewan needed. They didn't want to go over to countries like India and be able to talk about what we can do for them and how they can help us.

So the people that were living in Saskatchewan at the time, Mr. Speaker, were leaving for other opportunities. And now because of some of the indexation that we've done within our tax system and because of our growing strong economy and the good side of this government to be able to work with businesses, and beside businesses as well as communities, to help Saskatchewan grow, that's why people are choosing to stay in Saskatchewan right now, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm very proud to say that I was one of those few people that chose to stick it out in Saskatchewan during the dark days of the NDP. Because, Mr. Speaker, it was very difficult, it was very difficult times for me and my family to be able to choose to stay here. But I saw the potential. As being an original resident of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, it was the opportunity to come out here and change a lifestyle and try something different, Mr. Speaker. So it was the opportunity to make sure that my family had a good lifestyle. Growing up in Toronto? We had a very good life in Toronto, but coming out to Saskatchewan for a few personal trips, we saw that this was the land of opportunity. And you know what? Now, Mr. Speaker, 25 years after I've moved to Saskatchewan, other people are starting to see the land of opportunity.

I want to discuss some of the little breakdowns of exactly what's happening within our tax system, Mr. Speaker. And what is critically important that allows this government to be able to provide these tax incentives and these tax breaks and the distribution of a 1 per cent PST [provincial sales tax] to the rural municipalities is because of our strong economy, Mr. Speaker. That is critical.

[11:00]

This government is not going to borrow money in order to give out tax incentives. We are going to make sure that our tax incentives are founded in a strong economy and that we can be able to pay off and be able to call on our tax system to be able to help out the people of Saskatchewan. The Premier has said it, as many colleagues on this side, they said, the reason for growth is to help people — all people in Saskatchewan, not just the select few people in Saskatchewan.

And I can list off a long list of things that we've done within this province to be able to help out people in need. In Saskatoon, in my community alone, investments within the Lighthouse, the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program, the seniors' income plan. We have added things in, and the reason that we were able to do this is because of a strong economy.

The government on the other side, what they would do is strip out all of the revenue from the Crown corporations. They would borrow money, and they would always unfortunately be running to Ottawa with their hand out, Mr. Speaker, saying please help us people in Saskatchewan. Please help us because we can't help ourselves.

The difference is this government, we see the potential in the people of Saskatchewan. And we can help ourselves. We are helping ourselves, and we're doing that in order to make sure that all of the people of Saskatchewan benefit from our strong economy, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to talk a little bit about some of the breakdown of what it is for a family. Now, unopposed to what the opposition presents in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk about the facts, the actual facts that are documented. The fact is that a family and taxes, a family of four with a \$50,000 annual income will pay a minimal amount, just \$64 in provincial income tax. Sixty-four dollars on a household income of \$50,000. Now compare that to, in 2007 when the members opposite were in government, that was \$2,302. So it's gone from \$2,302 to \$64.

Now, Mr. Speaker, where do you think that that money is going? That money that people are saving — and I'll talk about this throughout my debate here, Mr. Speaker — that money is going back into the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan. Which in turn, they're spending that money in Saskatchewan to help out our economy. So it's a great little cycle that we have going on here where we provide tax incentives to people and they're able to invest that money back into Saskatchewan.

And some of the investments that they're doing within Saskatchewan is housing. A lot of people are because of the tax incentives. The first-time homeowners' credit, which is eligible up to \$1,100, we had over 7,000 people access that in 2013, Mr.

Speaker. Now that means that there are over 7,000 people in Saskatchewan who couldn't previously afford to own their home are now able to own their own home. Now that's a huge movement of people that were renting, and I've always been of the philosophy that if you're renting, you're not creating an asset. Now we have 7,000 people that are on this homeowners' tax credit that are actually creating assets for themselves and for the community.

And we did see some difficult times, Mr. Speaker, with the rents going up. And a lot of people with those rents increases were seeing, you know what, it's actually more affordable and more economical to be able to buy a house. So they access this. We've been putting more money back into their pockets, unlike the members opposite who were just continually pulling money out of the pockets. Every time that they got into a financial crisis they would just dip into everybody's pockets, pull it out different ways. They would pull it out through the Crowns. They would pull it out through raising the PST. They would pull it out raising income tax and property taxes as well. And on top of that, because they were so mismanaged over there, Mr. Speaker, they started shutting everything down. They started shutting the hospitals down. They started shutting the schools down.

This government has chose to invest in Saskatchewan and invest in the infrastructure of Saskatchewan. That's why in our 2015-16 budget, Mr. Speaker, we made sure that the infrastructure was still going forward. Because, Mr. Speaker, on programs when the opposition went into infrastructure and they got into some financial problems, all they did was just cancel the program or delay it. Well what kind of signal does that send to the people that are coming to Saskatchewan, when huge infrastructure programs are getting cancelled, Mr. Speaker? It's a matter of sending the right signals to the people who want to come to Saskatchewan is first, and the other, the people that want to choose Saskatchewan, to stay home. They want to stay here. They want to be with their family.

We look at our neighbours to the west in Alberta. They're in a very difficult financial crisis right now. The difference between Saskatchewan and Alberta, other than the obvious in the government side of things, is we've diversified. We have the ability here, unlike Alberta cannot diversify their economy as much as we can, Mr. Speaker. We have huge agricultural revenue coming. We have huge exports. We have our manufacturing sector. We have uranium, which the huge deal that was just signed with the Premier and the Prime Minister and Mr. Gitzel from Cameco, as well as the Prime Minister of India investing in our resources. We have uranium, oil, and gas, Mr. Speaker. And again that hasn't been the greatest, but I see in the markets lately that it is climbing back up.

And all of those diversified portfolio that we have, Mr. Speaker, allow us to invest in the people of Saskatchewan. This allows us to put the money back into the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan and allows them in turn to invest in Saskatchewan by buying homes, by buying automobiles, by purchasing anything from a television to new carpet. Those are Saskatchewan people investing in Saskatchewan companies. And I'm very proud of the government's tax incentives on this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch a little bit about, we've put that number out, \$5 billion. Now this number cannot be understated, Mr. Speaker. We have put \$5 billion, we've allowed \$5 billion in tax relief since 2007. Now that's a huge amount of money, Mr. Speaker. Now that's \$5 billion that's back into the people's pockets, programs like our graduate retention program which is a huge program. These tax incentives that we're allowing give us the opportunity to be able to keep our students here, to keep our children here, and for people to invest. Five billion dollars on, I think we're in and around a \$15 billion budget, Mr. Speaker. That's a huge amount.

We need to be able to make sure that the families of Saskatchewan are understanding the facts of what is going on with their government. We have a lot of accusations on the other side of the House on what they hear or somebody has said to them. But the facts are very clear on this, Mr. Speaker, is that we are having . . . we have a strong province. We have a strong government. We have strong business and we have strong communities.

Now when all of those work together, Mr. Speaker, that creates an environment for investment: that is, investment from the government, investment from external sources. And to be able to make sure that we continue that investment, we have to send the right signals to the rest of the world. And our trade missions that we've been able to be a part of — that the opposition didn't get part of, that they had nothing to do with; they didn't even want to touch any international trade — this is allowing us, when we talk about the investment from India, that money is coming directly into Saskatchewan. We are the largest deposit of uranium in Canada, second largest in the world, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty sure of that. But we want to make sure that those investments are available.

The government's job is not to block investment. The government's job is to manage the investment, manage the resources for the best of our province. We want to make sure that our families and that the people that we . . . that the expats that have left . . . And we also have a huge immigrant community coming into the province.

Now the immigrant community is not just coming into the province because they think it's the land of opportunity and this is a one stop. They are coming here. I've talked to them on the doors . They are buying houses. They are investing in Saskatchewan. They want to make a life here, Mr. Speaker. They want to be able to choose to be able to do whatever they want as far as their religious freedoms, and they want to be able to do that in Saskatchewan. Because Saskatchewan, even though it is an economic engine within Canada, it's also a lifestyle choice, Mr. Speaker. And we want to make sure that that lifestyle, that the people of Saskatchewan, the communities of Saskatchewan always have that lifestyle choice.

Personally I get to travel, and with work sometimes get to travel to big cities. And there's a lot to offer in the big cities, but there's nothing like coming home to Saskatchewan where you're able to enjoy the people that you meet, the people that you talk to. And everybody, everybody has the exact positive attitude that Saskatchewan is strong. We are not a flash in the pan, Mr. Speaker. This economy has been sitting stagnant for years, and now we've finally got a government that is able to

step out of the way and manage the resource base that we have and properly market it, Mr. Speaker.

It's great if you have all the oil in the world underneath you, or all the agriculture in the world, but if you can't get that product to market, then it's absolutely useless. Now the government has stepped out of the way to make sure that there is people out there and businesses out there to make sure that we can get our product to market, Mr. Speaker. The difference is that we take that investment that people are putting within Saskatchewan and we turn it into tax incentives. We turn it into lowering taxes on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to help out all the people in Saskatchewan.

Now I think the opposition keeps talking about these special friendships and that we are going to the, we're dealing with the 1 per cent of the province. I don't know how they can stand there and say that when we've done programs like the SAID program. We've increased the seniors' income plan. We've done a lot for everybody in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I am very proud that this government . . . That's why I wanted to become part of this government and I was fortunate enough to be elected, Mr. Speaker, is to help all the people in Saskatchewan, not just a certain few.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll again put the motion forward on the floor. And the motion reads:

That this Assembly supports the government's initiative to save Saskatchewan's families an estimated \$10.6 million in 2015 through the indexation of the provincial income tax system, which keeps taxes low, bringing young families to Saskatchewan by making life more affordable.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Sutherland:

That this Assembly supports the government's initiative to save Saskatchewan families an estimated 10.6 million in 2015 through the indexation of the provincial income tax system, which keeps taxes low and brings young families to Saskatchewan by making life more affordable.

I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this debate. And it is an interesting one, you know, because we often, we look at the other side and we look at their research, and we wonder sometimes where they get their facts from. And this is interesting. This is a very interesting motion here because in many ways this motion could have been written by us when we were in government. Because if they know this, they would know this fact, that it's been a well-established practice of the government of the day to index personal income taxes. This is nothing new.

Now these folks opposite kind of think that potash was discovered the day after the election on November 7th, and that oil all of a sudden came up from the ground the day after the election of November 7th. This was a well-established practice. The only reason I cannot support this motion, because we do

think it's the right thing, and it's been an established practice — and Calvert did it; Calvert did it, indexed personal income taxes — is that these folks opposite then will bend their arms around and give themselves a good pat on the back.

And some of the things, I have to say to the member opposite — I just want to clarify the record because I have said this — there are some good programs the government has done. And like I said, I think SAID is a good program. I think there should be recognition for that. And I just want to make sure that's correct. SIP [Saskatchewan Income Plan] is another one that I think is good. Good to see its increase. The only concern I would have with SIP is I would like to see more research done on it so . . . make sure it hits the right senior citizens. But is it right to increase it? That is true.

But I do have to say that we do have some concerns about whether or not we can say life is affordable here in Saskatchewan. I think the issue about whether indexing is good or bad, it's a well-established practice. That is the right thing. We know also that when Calvert was in power, that we did as well — and you would know this, and members opposite would know that — that we undertook an extensive personal income tax reform that was headed by Eric Cline, a former Finance minister, was fully implemented in 2003. And when personal income tax was simplified, rates were lowered. Fifty-five thousand were removed from the tax rolls, and the savings to individuals and families at that time was over \$1,000. And we know during that period of time the savings were about \$260 million.

[11:15]

So the idea of keeping taxes low is not a new one for government. It's been by both sides of the House. But the idea of whether or not it's more affordable here in Saskatchewan and is the government doing the right thing, I think that's the matter for debate here today.

And we think that this government really is out of touch when it comes to the kind of things that have happened in this budget, that happened where we saw cuts to programs that families truly needed. And I can think about the child care, parent child care subsidies that were actually cut and has had a record low for many years. I don't even know how far back it goes back. But for this government, they are funding it at the lowest level since they've taken power. That's a shame, Mr. Speaker. And we also know the family employment supplements are also being cut. That's a real shame.

And we know, we know that . . . And we've raised questions on this side of the House. And I know the member from Nutana will talk about Tara Hobbins and her experience with how affordable this province really is when it comes to finding affordable rental units and how Sask Housing is vacating that responsibility. And that's a huge responsibility. And they did a good job on that in the past, but now they've left that field open and they're not doing well there. But also daycare, what's happening there? And we know that in fact that there's lots of questions about the work that needs to be done.

And we know, and the members opposite would know this, that in fact there was a report that came out last year about how one

in four Saskatchewan kids now live in poverty. One in four Saskatchewan kids live in poverty. And we know the caseloads in social services have gone up 17 per cent since these folks took power. Now that's something we have to tackle. We have to tackle that.

I would have preferred much more today if we had a resolution from the government, from the other side, talking about their anti-poverty strategy. And I don't think I heard the members opposite talk about the anti-poverty strategy. I hope that the folks, the next two speakers do reference that because I do think that's a good thing. And I have said this on record, and we have called from this side of the House for a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy from the government. And I have said to the minister and in the media that it's good to see this coming forward, and we are excited about who's on the committee. We would have liked to have seen people with lived experience on that committee, but I think this is something we have to wrestle with. This is something we have to wrestle with.

We know as well, Saskatchewan leads the provinces of Canada in food bank usage for children. And what the numbers are here, overall food bank usage is up more than 19 per cent from March 2013 to March 2014 — the biggest increase in Canada. That clearly isn't something to be proud of. But the fact of the matter is we have a responsibility in this House, when we look across our province, to look at what needs attention. This needs attention. This really does need attention.

And so we have challenges before us. And I hope that the government members who get up to speak talk more about these kind of things because I do think that the government is on the right track having this strategy. And they're out consulting right now and I'm looking forward to hearing what they have to say. But the question will be, will they be in touch or out of touch with the people of Saskatchewan?

Families are having a tough time out there when it comes to affording rent, when it comes to affording child care, when it comes to affording food, and it's the same with seniors. We saw that with the seniors in terms of rent, food, and for seniors particularly pharmacare. That's a challenge. That is a real challenge.

So we have high hopes and we have a lot of expectation. And we really hope the members opposite address this issue here. And so we are all . . . And I just feel, and you know, in my riding, Mr. Speaker, this is often something that is really a concern.

And this government, leading up to the budget, really created a lot of angst in our communities around the price of oil and the impact it would have on our budget. But yet this budget continues to speak of record revenues, and that's not a bad thing. That means our province is doing well in other areas, and that's a good thing.

But the question is, people are concerned. They're concerned about jobs. They're concerned about the economy. They are concerned about the price of oil. What does this mean for people in their communities and their families right across the province?

And you know, when I think about Tara Hobbins, who had the courage to speak up and say, you know, things are not as they should be, she doesn't have social issues. She is just a working mom with two kids, who are trying to get ahead, trying to get as many hours. She's got a good job. She's making . . . in a union setting, and so she has benefits. But the problem is that wages really haven't kept up for too many people here in Saskatchewan. They really haven't.

And so while we can talk about the tax reductions, we have to know that that has been happening for many, many years here in this province, and we have to acknowledge that. But the problems are . . . The reality of the day is that we can't sit back and pat ourselves on the back. We have to take a look at what people are telling us when we knock on the doors. They're seeing their schools are not supported. They're overcrowded. They're waiting for these schools to be built. I don't know how many years it's been since the first announcement. This is a problem. This is a real problem. And many people are just one step away from feeling the real hit of poverty. And if they were to lose their job, this is a stress that they feel really, really . . . They feel it too much.

So we see the situation with the Crowns, and where the member from Sutherland talked about the Crowns but didn't talk about how the utilities. The bundle of utilities that people have to pay has gone up, has gone up by over \$400, that bundle, since 2007. That's a reality of a real cost when those folks there moved away from guaranteeing the lowest cost bundles in Canada. They said they would let the market have its way, and it did. It did. And too many people are feeling that, especially the cost of power. And I know other . . . We can talk at length about why that is.

But, Mr. Speaker, I definitely won't be supporting this resolution. It's almost good, but not quite. And so with that, I yield the floor.

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

Mr. Tochor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow. What we heard from the member opposite from Saskatoon Centre is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. I have some material here that we'll be going over, some fact-checking, because we know, Mr. Speaker, that the fact is that things have been lately a little bit loose in this Assembly.

There's a couple of things that the member touched on I just want to correct for the record here. He talked about how it wasn't this party being elected in 2007 that discovered oil. He said we didn't discover potash. We didn't discover uranium. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? He was correct. We didn't. But there was something that was holding back those three industries. What was it, Mr. Speaker? Why would industry not be interested in investing in this province? It's not because we've discovered those resources. It was the fact that the climate in this province was one of fear, a fear of the NDP coming in and taking over the industry, one of over-taxation.

The NDP has a record of changing the rules in the game midstream, Mr. Speaker, and that scared industry. It scared investment in this province. And he was right. We didn't

discover oil in this province, but what happened? Why everything did take off is that we started to talk about the positive aspects of work in Saskatchewan, the positive investment climate. We talked about what Saskatchewan could be, instead of the fear.

Mr. Speaker, even today they're still selling fear. We had the member from Saskatoon Centre talk about how people were fearful, fearful of the economy and fearful of the price of oil. Mr. Speaker, he also talked about the growth of wages and not keeping up. We have the fastest wage growth in Canada, Mr. Speaker, one of the top five, back and forth for a number of years, which is helping offset those costs of living.

He also talked about the cost of living in Saskatchewan and, Mr. Speaker, we've done things differently than the NDP. Mr. Speaker, we looked at the taxations of the province. He talked about low-income earners and, Mr. Speaker, they are the segment of the population that have enjoyed the largest decreases in provincial sales tax. That money that they've earned is now sitting in their pockets, not the government's treasurer.

Mr. Speaker, just a quick example. A family of four earning around \$50,000, these individuals roughly have an 85 per cent reduction in total provincial taxes. Mr. Speaker, their tax bill, the provincial tax bill went from . . . it used to be 3,382 in 2007 so when the NDP . . . last full year of them as government, that family of four would have paid \$3,382. That has been reduced to, this year, \$489, Mr. Speaker. That's a reduction in taxation of \$2,893.

Mr. Speaker, it's a number, and we hear a lot of numbers in the Assembly, and I just want to give a context of what \$2,893 would buy you. In our household we were lucky enough, we welcomed our second son into the world a couple of months ago, and James goes through a lot of diapers. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? If that family of four decided to spend their savings in tax, this year alone they would be able to, or I would be able to buy 18,000 diapers for baby James. Think about that. So that's a lot of diapers, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot of savings that families have to spend on diapers. They're never going to spend that much on diapers hopefully but if they did . . .

Now what about baby wipes? I know the member from Walsh Acres and I, we've changed a fair bit of our diapers in our two houses as we've been . . .

An Hon. Member: — Our diapers?

Mr. Tochor: — No, it was . . . [inaudible] . . . So what would those savings account for, Mr. Speaker? Well you could also buy baby wipes. You could buy 111,000 baby wipes with the savings from this government.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of savings that low-income earners and families across Saskatchewan have received from the changes from this government. Other areas that they could save on or what they could spend their savings on is, you know, now our neighbourhoods are growing. It's younger. There's kids in the street. And maybe you'd like to take some kids out to a Rider game. Well you could buy 96 tickets for kids to the next Rider game because of the reductions in income tax. Say if you

wanted to take the family for a drive, a quick little drive, you could go in a 2011 Dodge Caravan. You could go 23,713 kilometres, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, now those are a little bit comical, but let's talk about real families. What could you also buy? Well food is a major part. Now I wouldn't recommend this as a proper diet for a family, but you could buy 1,808 boxes of Kraft Dinner with the savings from the tax reductions from this government. And you know, having a young family you go through coffee, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of late nights and early mornings. You could buy . . . I'm talking about the 320 gram tin of coffee. You could buy 482 large tins of coffee. And, Mr. Speaker, mind you, this is per year, what you could spend your money on.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks a lot about eggs and baskets and whatnot.

An Hon. Member: — How many eggs can you buy?

Mr. Tochor: — Guess how many eggs you could buy, Mr. Speaker? Well you could buy . . . It depends on where you buy them. I do a little bit of shopping so we . . . There's Sobeys and Co-op, and sometimes Co-op does have a better price on them I find, but you've got to watch there. You could buy 9,918 eggs, Mr. Speaker.

Here's another one actually that, it's good for looking at numbers and remembering facts, is carrots, Mr. Speaker. It's good for your eyesight. And with the savings from tax decreases around this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, you could buy four thousand, eight, eighty-eight pounds of carrots. That's incredible. Another one that the opposition love to invest in would be potatoes, Mr. Speaker. Guess how many potatoes that the average family of four would save because of the tax decreases introduced by this government. Well they could buy 5,400 pounds of potatoes, Mr. Speaker.

And you know what? We've had some difficulties it seems in this House remembering facts and making sure that things are correct when presented. There's been increased studies that antioxidants in bananas is great for memory and brain power and remembering details. And, Mr. Speaker, you could buy 3,819 pounds of bananas with the savings from this government they introduced for a family of four. Mr. Speaker, that is significant savings for those families.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition talked about what they did in government. Well, you know what? We know what they did in government. They raised taxes. They raised taxes 17 times, Mr. Speaker. They raised the PST three times. They raised income tax twice. They raised business taxes four times. Mr. Speaker, this is the climate that this province used to live under with the NDP government. I hope we never go back.

[11:30]

Mr. Speaker, in their literature that they've mailed out, there's some factually challenging statements in documents they've mailed out. They talk about health care. Mr. Speaker, this one's, I would say for the people of Saskatchewan, an important topic. And I would ask the opposition, what would they do differently? Because since forming government, we've

increased the health budget 49 per cent. That's significant. So they're saying you should spend more money in health care. How much? Where's the plan? Where would that money come from?

And this is what people of the province, when they receive a flyer in the mail and say, okay the NDP would like to spend more money on health care, where would the money come from, Mr. Speaker? From a growing economy. That is what we're focused on, is because we can take those dividends' growth and put back into the important social programs such as health care.

Mr. Speaker, they also talked about education, and it's farcical when we talk about what the NDP record on education was. I put on the record that they were actually in charge when my elementary school closed. They closed my elementary school, that along with, I believe, over 150 schools. And they criticize us for why there isn't . . . the schools that we're building right now are done already. That's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

Very shortly in, well less than a year, we'll have the honour to go knock on those doors that the member opposite referenced. And I will proudly stand in front of the electorate and say this is our record for what we've done in the last four years. It would be interesting to see if they would, in the last 16 years when they were in government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it's my honour to be able to rise and enter this debate here in the Legislative Assembly in Saskatchewan. It's strange times we live in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we have the government patting itself on the back for indexing a provincial income tax system which is something that many governments do and certainly the previous government did.

It's an unusual venue or a launch pad for these guys to pat themselves on the back about everything that they see has been accomplished by this government. But, Mr. Speaker, I think what's really important in this debate and to consider it a real debate is to hear the other side. There is another side to the back-patting and the crowing and the boasting and the chest pumping, the thumping that we see these people do.

And I think what I really want to get on the record in my 10 minutes in the debate is a letter that I received from a constituent who's had to leave my riding now because of housing issues and unaffordable issues. But here's a letter I received. Her name's Tara Hobbins and she wrote to me a couple weeks ago and she sent me this letter. And the heading of the letter is, life unfair. And it says:

Dear Cathy Sproule,

Hello, my name is Tara Hobbins. I'm a single mother of two girls currently both five. No they're not twins, I just had them so close together that they share the same age for two months out the year. I have a few concerns I would like to discuss if you're willing to take the time to listen.

And she goes on to talk about her problems, first of all with day care, and those are huge issues, Mr. Speaker, that I'm afraid I won't have the time to address in the debate today. But I want to talk a little bit about her housing situation. And this is something that is affecting a lot of women in her situation.

Tara is working hard. She works hard. She has a full-time job and she's trying to provide for her two children. And she says:

Now for the biggest issue I am now facing. I am on the verge of homelessness. This upsets me due to the fact that I'm a hard . . . responsible employee and strive to maintain a good life. I don't think that working \$14 an hour, I should have this problem. I've applied to Terra Housing Co-operative, but was informed it could be another year to get in, and also Sask Housing. My roommate will be moved out at the end of the month, and I will be responsible for \$1,249 rent a month, not including bills. I'm on rental and employment subsidy and have been informed I won't be getting any extra help with my rent increase.

With my living expenses and child care expenses, I'm worried I won't have enough money for food nor a roof over my head. I've been applying for other jobs but am having a hard time finding anything with my daughter's current school schedule. I'm at the end of my rope, and I'm unsure what to do. I've been looking for cheaper two-bedroom apartments or basement suites, but they are equivalent to the same price as my current place. I will continue to keep looking and will keep trying to make . . . but I think this is ridiculous.

On Friday, family housing offered me a three-bedroom apartment on Avenue M with a possibility of a cockroach and bedbug infestation. I was revolted. How can a government property have such low standards? I would never subject my kids to a rundown apartment in the bad area of town that is infested with rodents.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's just a few quotes from one of my constituents. She's now found a place to live, but it's not with Sask Housing. But she did actually find a place to live and she informs me that she thinks she'll be okay. But I think the thing about this is the fact that individuals have to come forward with these stories, and if we can't believe these people that are telling us these stories . . . And this government likes to dismiss them and say that they're all liars and that they're all making it up, but that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. These people are coming forward with real stories, with real issues, and there's continual dismissal on the part of this government on those stories.

Another story that we see just recently, April 8th in Estevan, *The Estevan Mercury*, is about more first-timers using the food bank. So we have the member from Eastview crowing about how many boxes of Kraft Dinner you could buy on the tax receipts. What he doesn't realize is anything that they've done on that side has been completely wiped out by the cost of living on the part of individuals.

So *Estevan Mercury*, we have the people . . . Here's a quote from the article. This is by Alex Coop on April 8th: "Many people experiencing financial struggles for the first time are

turning to the Estevan Salvation Army's food bank, which is experiencing struggles of its own." And the article goes on to describe all the difficulties the actual Salvation Army food bank is having meeting the increased needs of folks in Estevan.

Here's another quote: "Bobolo said the shelter was open for 136 nights since November, 2014. This is an eight per cent increase over last year's numbers. Attendance has gone up 22 per cent as well, resulting from the 576 stays at the shelter."

So, Mr. Speaker, again we have the facts. We have the fact that the Estevan Food Bank is experiencing difficulty meeting the increasing needs of people in Estevan, of all places, Mr. Speaker. We have the fact that the shelter in Estevan has also seen a huge increase in the demand for space and shelter in Estevan, Mr. Speaker.

Another article that was posted in November by the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] was about food bank use by children, Mr. Speaker. And there we see that food . . . This is a quote, a direct quote from the news article. They can deny this all they want: "Food bank usage in Saskatchewan went up by more than 50 per cent over the past six years, says Food Banks Canada." Over the past six years, food bank usage by children has gone up over 50 per cent. If that isn't concerning to this government, if they continue to pat themselves on the back about their tax arrangements, they aren't paying attention to what's going on.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out some numbers that actually come from the government's budget documents. We have the budget document, *Budget and Performance Plan Summary* from 2007-08, and then we go on to the budget 2015-16. So on page — just so they know where the facts are — page 36 of the 2007-2008 *Budget and Performance Plan Summary*, there's a list of the 2007 intercity comparison of taxes and household charges, single person, \$25,000 total income. And on page 65 of this year's budget, we have the same intercity comparison. What I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, is compare between these two years, 2007-2008 and 2015-2016, the difference in increase for the cost of living for all the cities that are itemized here.

I will point out that for some reason they've switched from using Regina to Saskatoon. So the comparison I'm making here is Vancouver to Vancouver, Calgary to Calgary, but it's Regina to Saskatoon. So that's one distinction, and we're not sure why the number, the city has changed. But the rest of the cities are the same. So I've totalled up the increase in taxes and household charges for individuals, single people at \$25,000, and how much they've actually increased in the last — what would this be? — eight years since this government came into power.

The lowest increase can be found in Saint John, which is \$1,160; second up is Halifax, \$1,242; third is Charlottetown, \$2,266 increase. Then we go a little bit west. We go to Winnipeg for number four, and the increase in their taxes in household charges is \$2,393. Then we go really far to the west, to British Columbia and Vancouver, where the increase is \$2,650. Then we go back again to Toronto; Toronto's increase is only \$2,698. Then back east to St. John's, \$3,702. Number nine — so this is nine out of ten provinces — is Calgary. The increase there has been \$3,807. And number 10, bottom of the

list for the increase in taxes, or top of the list for increase in taxes and household charges across Canada in the last eight years, is Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we see an increase here of \$4,378, and this is from the government's budget document. So I don't think they can dispute that this is a fact. The fact is, is that Saskatchewan people are paying way more than any other province in Canada for their taxes and their household charges. Mr. Speaker, that's not something to pat yourself on the back about. That is something that this government has failed to pay attention to. And they continue just to crow about what they see as their advances, but they're not dealing with the issues for people with . . . This is only the single person, at \$25,000 total income, I haven't done the comparison for . . . There's another chart that the government provides for, I think it's families at \$75,000 total income and \$50,000. I haven't had the time to compare that; maybe that tells a better story.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, for single people at \$25,000 total income, for people living in Saskatchewan, the increase since this government came into power has put it at the top of the heap. We pay more for these people to live, and these are the people like Tara Hobbins who are just trying to raise their family and they're just trying to eke out a living and have a comfortable living.

So, Mr. Speaker, this kind of motion is so self-serving for this government. It gives some of these back benchers an opportunity to get up and crow a little bit and do the math on macaroni. But, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't help the people in their own budget document who are suffering at the highest rate of increase in Canada. So I will not be supporting this motion.

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

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well I'm very pleased to stand in the House today and participate in this debate moved by the member from Saskatoon Sutherland. And it reads:

That this Assembly supports the government's initiative to save Saskatchewan families an estimated \$10.6 million in 2015 through the indexation of the provincial income tax system, which keeps taxes low and brings young families to Saskatchewan by making life more affordable.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the right thing to do, and this is why our government is doing it. This is wonderful news. Saskatchewan is striving forward and opportunities are endless. And we're keeping in mind the needs of Saskatchewan people. These people are our friends and neighbours in our communities, the total of Saskatchewan's province.

Keeping Saskatchewan strong has kept Saskatchewan people here in the province. And this is what many of my colleagues are talking about today. Our next generation has decided that Saskatchewan is a great place to live and work and raise your families. And our government has invested in the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have incentives for new job creations, and we keep taxes low. Generally we have created the environment where people want to live. They go to

school here. They open businesses. And perhaps we'll even retire as we get older here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have a very large family, so I can speak of them as an example. There are 17 of us now and counting. Our son Matthew and our daughter-in-law Katie are raising five children on the farm. He flies his Cessna to work. We have a wonderful life. We have the airstrip right on the farm, so he's able to fly around to his different properties and farm and has some other business pursuits. And Matthew previously worked out of Saskatchewan, but as our business climate in Saskatchewan became more welcoming, well he came home. So he lives close by, and I'm the grandmother of his five children, which I get to see as often as I want when I'm home in Saskatchewan Rivers constituency. And Matthew's children I think will probably be third-generation farmers, some of them.

[11:45]

So it is a very good climate that we are building here in Saskatchewan, and of course I would say through good leadership of our government. And we've made some great choices that people say, yes this is where I want to open businesses and live and work and raise a family.

Now our second child Brigitt is a social worker and a nurse, and she's married to a newcomer who happens to be a doctor. So they live close by, and they're raising their two children right next to grandma and grandma as well. So I'm very blessed. I get to see all seven grandchildren often. I'm able to give advice and share in the everyday things that grandparents and grandchildren do share, the family celebrations, as well as very importantly, the community involvement for Saskatchewan. As they say, it takes a village to raise these children, so it's nice to have all of us around.

Now our youngest daughter Lacey completed her master's in speech language pathology. She finished up in Oklahoma, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She had a job opportunity in California or Yorkton, Saskatchewan where one of my colleagues is. So we were very pleased for her to come home to Saskatchewan. She chose Yorkton and . . .

An Hon. Member: — The province's third-largest trading area.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Yes. So she is living in Saskatchewan and working, and we're very proud of this. And perhaps this graduate retention program was one of the incentives, the 20,000 over 10 years for graduates who choose to stay and live and work in Saskatchewan. That was something that our daughter was able to use. And in Saskatchewan today, speech language pathologists are up 24 per cent due to our government's vision. So I'd also like to think our daughter came home because of mom and dad, but life is more affordable now in Saskatchewan.

Now our youngest son Markus was going to school in the States as well, but then he was accepted to the College of Dentistry at the University of Saskatchewan. So he is now in the province, and he has prepared a yard site next to us as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So he will be living close by with his brothers and sisters and his parents, and he will make his living working right here in the province of Saskatchewan. So I'm very proud

to say that he'll be coming home as well.

And it's no surprise to most of us that these young people are now staying and their suitcases are only packed to go on holidays. Saskatchewan is very affordable due to our government's supports. We've got low taxes and our resource-based economy, and it's the right thing to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today, Saskatchewan is stronger than at any point in our history.

Since 2007, working together we've built a foundation of economic strength and stability with one goal in mind, to provide a better quality of life for everyone: our youth, our seniors, urban and rural. We've reduced the provincial debt. We've cut taxes, invested in critical infrastructure in education, health care, and highways, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are an economic leader in Canada.

Yesterday we had a huge announcement for the economy. Our leader was part of a historic uranium energy deal signing with India, providing employment and the Saskatchewan communities and supports that it does support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is Saskatchewan the best place to live and work and raise a family? Well I was listening intently to the members from Saskatoon Nutana and Saskatoon Centre, and I'd like to give them the reasons why there are changes, changes since 2007 to improve tax competitiveness. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the past seven years our government has implemented the following measures to improve Saskatchewan's tax competitiveness. We cut personal income taxes. Our government cut education property taxes which, being a rural landowner and a rural member in my constituency, this was very, very important. We've improved the provincial sales tax for families, and we've reduced the small business corporate income tax rate.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when people are asking us where has the money gone, we've talked about debt reduction. Since 2007 we've saved nearly 1 billion in interest. The personal income tax reductions introduced since 2007 have removed almost 112,000 Saskatchewan residents from the provincial income tax roll. And in total, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these reductions are providing approximately 490 million in income tax savings in Saskatchewan residents in 2015.

So it is no surprise when all these people are returning to Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our friends and neighbours and relatives. This is the place to be from. And I'm very proud to be representing Saskatchewan Rivers constituency and seeing the influx of young people come back. And in our small towns of Choiceland and Meath Park and Love and Debden, Saskatchewan, I am seeing more retirees come back as well and embracing what Saskatchewan has to offer. And our little towns are growing with the retirees.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting this motion, of course. And I will read it again:

That the Assembly supports the government's initiative to save Saskatchewan families an estimated 10.6 million in 2015 through the indexation of the provincial income tax system, which keeps taxes low and brings young families

to Saskatchewan by making life more affordable.

This is a good thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this is the right thing to do. This is what the people of Saskatchewan have asked us to do, and I do believe we are listening.

And with that, I know there's more people who would like to talk about why Saskatchewan is the best place to live and raise a family, and with that I will sit. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, people often wonder what the 75-minute debate on Thursdays is about. Why do we have this format? And, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that the answer to the ordinary viewing public and others is that this is the most political part of what happens in the legislature.

And, Mr. Speaker, this motion today which talks about, you know, basically a standard practice in government about indexing these rates — and it's been going on for many, many years — is really answering or trying to answer or obscuring I think would be the better way to put it, the answer to the question, where did all the money go? And, Mr. Speaker, people across the province are asking themselves that question, and they're looking at how and what's happening in their own household.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the things that the government is trying to obscure with this particular motion today and this discussion today is the fact that it costs a lot more money for everybody in the province to live. And practically there's quite a number of our citizens who are getting left behind or being pushed out to various places. We're hearing a lot about that. But I think even more so, the members opposite are hearing that when people are saying, well where did the money go? What has happened with the money? Why am I not feeling as if everything is benefiting me?

I can look around and I can see some people in our community are doing very, very well. But there's a whole bunch of other people who are starting to worry about how they're going to afford things as they move forward. What we know is that there are people across the province who have moved out of the cities because they can't afford to live there anymore, and they're living in a lot of smaller communities. Now that's not necessarily a bad thing, but the transportation services to get people back into the city for medical appointments, social service appointments, all those things, are being diminished. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that the question here for the Premier is, what's happened in this province as far as the ordinary people that are here in the province and the question about the fair distribution of the benefits for all the people of the province? And that's that fundamental political question that is being raised today. It's why the government has put this motion forward because they are concerned and they're hearing on the doorstep, they're hearing right across the province, is that you better tell us what happened to this money because we're not feeling it. And, Mr. Speaker, when that question comes home to roost, the Premier will be quickly off to some other place.

Now I was very curious today to hear the next step in the

Premier's plan for his next career. I think he wants to get an ambassadorship somewhere in the Far East. I mean he's lost out on the one in the US. We know that. But now he's got a whole plan ahead to figure out how he can go to India, Vietnam, China, who knows where. And, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for us who are going to stay here in Saskatchewan, we're going to have to pick up the pieces. We're going to have to answer this question: where did all the money go?

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that this motion today, and especially the speech from the mover of this motion, was an attempt to tell a big story, to tell a big, big, big explanation that just doesn't hang true.

Now so many of the notes that the members opposite have been using will say, you know, 2007 everything's been roses. Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that it was the taxation discussion which all members of the House, both sides, were part of in various ways when Mr. Vicq and his team looked at taxation in the province, and that made a difference in the longer term economic possibilities that are here. And, Mr. Speaker, I think there needs to be an acknowledgement that even this particular motion today is just a continuation of some of the taxation policies of the previous government or governments. And, Mr. Speaker, that is where so much of what's happening this year and in motions like this today is an attempt to obscure what's happened before.

Now we know that they have a communications plan, for example, to talk about the fact that the infrastructure in the province has lots of needs for repair, whether it's the highways, schools, all those other things, and we can point those out. That's what people are pointing out to us. And they're asking us, well where did all the money go? We've had the best years in the history of the province. None of us will deny that. But where has that money gone?

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's the fundamental question that has to be asked. You know, \$10 million on this kind of an indexation kind of question really is about the whole plan that the government doesn't have for making sure that the people, all of the people of the province, benefit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the government comes forward with a budget that effectively pushes the costs of things and the things that they are actually doing out over 10, 20, 30, sometimes even 40 years, we know that we're all going to be paying for that later. And, Mr. Speaker, we're uneasy with that because we've seen that scenario before. And unfortunately the Premier and number of the others on that side actually were working in a government that did that once before, which took us a long time to sort out.

And, Mr. Speaker, when they come forward again with this big illusion, this big myth about how things are all fine, and they don't ask the fundamental question of how have they spent the money to benefit the people, all the people of Saskatchewan, then that's where we have a problem.

[12:00]

Now, Mr. Speaker, when this particular question has been brought forward in the whole number of areas, we have people

who will come to us and say, well we're quite uneasy about raising some of these concerns, but we're seeing it in our own families. We know that more of our young people will end up having to stay living with their parents longer because they can't afford to find a new place to live. We know that seniors are looking at their rising utility bills and saying, well how can I afford to live, not just in their home, but in the condominium or some kind of housing where they are paying some of these utility bills as well or just in the general overall cost. But, Mr. Speaker, those are questions that go right through every person in the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, we know that the government doesn't appear to have a plan that will include everybody, and that is I think the fundamental question. And so practically, when the Premier goes and does the same kind of work that Premier Calvert did and Premier Romanow did in promoting the province around the world, he'd be best reminded to build on the good relationships that they built across the world rather than have members come up in the House like they did today and basically say, oh this never happened before. It's just our Premier that's some kind of a star out there. Because that goes right again, right to this fundamental question: where did all the money go? What's our Premier up to? Why isn't he dealing with ambulance costs? Why isn't he dealing with the things that affect people day to day? Why isn't he dealing with the low-cost housing issues that are there? Because that is the fundamental question as you move forward toward a next election. Now what we know is that all political campaigns seem to revolve around leaders, and I think this one's going to revolve right around that leader himself. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — The time for debate has expired. Questions. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, a key part of affordability is really about food security, and we know the usage of food banks has gone up incredibly here in Saskatchewan. But yet we hear the member from Eastview wax on about Kraft Dinner. Now I, like everybody, can enjoy a good box of Kraft Dinner, but I don't know about 1,800 boxes of Kraft Dinner. He may buy them at the Co-op, and I'm glad to hear that. But 1,800 boxes of Kraft Dinner, that's five boxes a day. Is he really serious that families in Saskatchewan should be looking at five boxes of Kraft Dinner a day? Is that this government's response to affordability here in Saskatchewan?

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

Mr. Tochor: — Mr. Speaker, that's comical, but yet the question that the member poses isn't . . . We talked about the savings from taxation and what you could spend that money on, just to give an example of what the ridiculous amount of money that has been saved, what you can buy, a ridiculous amount of money, of Kraft Dinner.

Mr. Speaker, but I just want to clarify. The member from Lakeview talked about the recent announcement with uranium at the federal level and how that he questioned on the facts that we brought up in a member's statement. And, Mr. Speaker, it was talking about the editorial from *The StarPhoenix*. It wasn't

our words, what they thought about the announcement and what our government was doing to improve the economy in this province. It was the editorial board of *The StarPhoenix*. Thank you.

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

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, since 2007 our government has provided \$5 billion in tax relief with some of the largest tax cuts in Saskatchewan's history. Since our government was elected, Saskatchewan residents have saved approximately \$490 million a year in personal income tax reductions. This has made life more affordable for Saskatchewan citizens. To the member from Saskatoon Nutana: with some of the largest tax cuts in Saskatchewan's history, the NDP seem to like nothing more than to go on a spending spree with Saskatchewan taxpayer dollars. Would you roll back the tax cuts, back to help pay for this, further burdening Saskatchewan residents?

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question because what I'd like to talk about is tax reductions, but these are tax reductions that were done by the previous government. For example, as a result of personal income tax reforms that began in 2000-2001 and fully implemented in 2003, provincial income tax was simplified. Rates were lowered. Fifty-five thousand people were removed from the tax rolls, and individuals and families realized a savings averaging over \$1,000. The total annual benefit was \$620 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on, but again I think the mover of this motion thinks that the sun only was created in 2007 and he doesn't realize that there was actual history in this province of good, solid tax reform prior to this government coming into power.

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

Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member from Saskatchewan Rivers. The government had a proposal put forward where they worked to get some affordable housing here in the city of Regina. When the whole deal seemed to be costing slightly more, rather than thinking about the people who might, the ability to deal with the affordable housing, does the member from Saskatchewan Rivers agree with the fact that this government has fallen down on the wayside as it deals with social housing, with this one proposal here in Regina being a good example of where they've blinked and not done their job?

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

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you for the question. Our government supports families saving money. We've saved approximately 10.6 million through the provincial income tax system, and that's what this motion is about. It's about keeping taxes low and bringing young families to Saskatchewan to make life more affordable.

We're very proud of our record, and the changes since 2007 to improve tax competitiveness is what this motion is about. Thank you.

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

Mr. Lawrence: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've heard time and time again about all the things that were not possible and what the former NDP leader, Lorne Calvert, had to say about our "so-called plan."

Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the reason why the NDP don't want to talk about the plan is because the NDP's own Harry Van Mulligen said:

Why don't parties want to talk about tax hikes during elections? I don't know. I suspect anyone who talks about tax hikes is not likely to be very popular during the course of an election campaign.

The facts today is that the NDP have no plan and love to haphazardly tax and spend until someone else comes to clean up their mess that they've left.

To the member from Saskatoon Centre: when can we expect to hear your manifesto on tax . . . I mean plans that you have for Saskatchewan residents?

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I find it just passing strange that that member would ask a question about cleaning up messes, because we know what happened in the '80s and who had to clean up the mess from the '80s and the '90s. And people out there . . . You all know it. They all know it. They all know it.

But you know what I find very strange, Mr. Speaker? We had three speakers from the other side talk about affordable living in Saskatchewan, but not one of them mentioned the anti-poverty strategy that was such a big deal for this government in the Throne Speech. But we heard nothing from it from the Premier in his speech. We hadn't heard nothing about that from the Minister of Finance and from any of those folks over there during their budget speeches, not a word about poverty in this province. What's the plan from them on that?

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Speaker, if this government was serious about making life more affordable, it wouldn't have shut down the affordable housing program. If this government was serious about making life more affordable, it would have enforced the terms of its contract with Deveraux instead of letting them off the hook and giving away an affordable housing project.

And the member for Saskatoon Eastview has said he doesn't think the government should have anything to do with housing. How can the member for Eastview defend this government's record on affordable housing?

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

Mr. Tochor: — Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that the NDP continue to run down local businesses in this province.

They want to talk about social services, Mr. Speaker? Overall spending has increased by 34 per cent in social services, from 900 million to \$1.2 billion, Mr. Speaker. That would be more, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government is dedicated on making life affordable for families. That's why you've seen us continually to decrease taxes and to index. And this is what the debate's about, is proper indexing of our taxation, income tax. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hutchinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard a lot from the members opposite in recent months about new programs that they would like to fund if they were in fact in government. This includes funding new programs for Crown corporations, health care, education, the creation of a heritage fund, and much, much more. Now, Mr. Speaker, while we might not agree with all their initiatives, certainly some of them may well have merit. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that they haven't proposed a plan, even a shred of a plan, for how they would like to pay for these things.

To the member from Saskatoon Nutana: other than taking money away from municipalities and farmers, as proposed by your colleague from Regina Lakeview, how do you propose to pay for these promises and programs?

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

Ms. Sproule: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the issue that's in discussion here is this government's performance. And what I want to talk about is how they have failed people, particularly in the category of the poorest of the poor. We hear all this talk in the Throne Speech about poverty reduction strategy. What do we see in the budget? Nothing. We see the costs for a single person at \$25,000 total income have exploded here in Saskatchewan since this government came into power, and we don't see anything where we're advancing programs like affordable housing. In fact, what have they done to affordable housing? They've got rid of it, Mr. Speaker. They don't even have the program anymore.

We're seeing poor people that are contacting my office and telling me, working poor, Mr. Speaker, who are suffering and really having trouble making a go of it, and the kind of sympathy they get from this government is less than heartwarming, shall I say.

So I think these people like to brag. They like to pat themselves on the back. They like to, you know, rabble-rouse the back benchers. But, Mr. Speaker, they're not doing their job for Saskatchewan people.

The Deputy Speaker: — Time for the 75-minute debate has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 609 — *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act*

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's actually with a great deal of frustration today that I rise in the Assembly once again to call for this government to take action to ensure that seniors and other residents in care facilities are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. It's frustrating because we still shouldn't have to fight for this.

Family after family after family have come to the legislature with heartbreaking stories of an unacceptable quality of care, of chronic short-staffing, and of premature deaths. The public has heard of at least seven premature deaths in care facilities. We have Margaret Warholm, Jesse Sellwood, Lorne Rowell, Fern Chingos, Irene Hohne, Lois Rein, and the elderly gentleman we heard about last week with dementia in Moose Jaw. And we've heard many other stories that haven't been made public.

I don't know how the Premier and his two Health ministers and all of those government MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] can sit here and hear those tragic stories and still refuse to take the seniors' care crisis seriously.

We know that families have spoken up publicly. They're just a small portion of the families that have come forward to us with very real concerns. At last report, the Ombudsman had received 79 complaints about the quality of seniors' care in our province, 79 formal complaints. That means the Ombudsman's last update at the end of January, her office has received an additional 44 complaints.

And it's not exactly like this Ombudsman's investigation is widely advertised. The reality is that most families with loved ones in care will have no idea that an investigation is even going on. The Ombudsman says these complaints come from all over the province and focus on "poor quality of care, low staff-to-resident ratios, a poor organizational culture within facilities, lack of communications with family and residents, and a long-term care system lacking in accountability."

So that is why this is so frustrating. Despite so many problems in seniors' care, this government is still refusing to listen to residents, to their families, and to front-line staff. That has to stop, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government scrapped the minimum care standards in special care home regulations. These regulations used to require a minimum of two hours per day of nursing and personal care for residents, but this government quietly got rid of that minimum care standard. That two-hour standard wasn't even close to good enough, so this government should have strengthened and improved the minimum care standard, but instead it chose to scrap them entirely. The government's

excuse for doing away with minimum quality of care standards is that it didn't want to limit the care that is provided to seniors. But that doesn't make any sense. Minimum care standards simply act as a floor. A minimum wage doesn't serve as a maximum wage. We want people to make more than minimum wage. That is a good thing.

[12:15]

The government's other excuse for doing away with minimum quality of care standards is that it claims it wants to deliver more personalized care instead. Well that also doesn't make an ounce of sense. There should be personalized care for everyone in a care facility, but in no way does that preclude the need for basic guarantees. But the Sask Party government, using absolutely bizarre logic, got rid of minimum care standards, and the Premier and his two Health ministers keep hiding behind the program guidelines for special care homes they claim are sufficient.

But we've obtained and released internal emails from the main Health minister's own office that shows his former chief of staff wrote to the Health ministry officials and said, "Is there any further policy development or requirements under each of these items, under section 1.4 for care standards? These are good but extremely general." And a senior ministry official wrote back saying, "I do not believe there are more specifics . . ." Extremely general guidelines are not good enough. And what this means is that we have a quality of care that is horribly uneven across the province and terribly inadequate.

We know that from the 250 pages of urgent requests submitted by care facilities last year that the level of care is very different, depending upon where you live in this province. The urgent request documents show that if you're a senior in the Heartland Health Region, you get about three hours less care per week than you do if you're in the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region. It's unacceptable for the standard of seniors' care to be so uneven and so inadequate.

That's one of the reasons why the NDP chose to introduce this legislation in the first place last year and to reintroduce it again this session. The legislation would establish a residents-in-care bill of rights, and it would require the government to regulate province-wide minimum care standards. A legislated bill of rights is a step that the government's own Law Reform Commission said would help address problems in seniors' care.

The Law Reform's final report, *Civil Rights in Saskatchewan Long-term Care Facilities*, said this:

Responses to the *Consultation Paper* overwhelmingly supported a mandatory residents' bill of rights for all long-term care homes. Only one response suggested that a bill of rights may not be necessary, as other avenues, such as regional or provincial policy guidelines, may give residents the same protection and respect. The Commission believes that the accessibility of a residents' bill of rights is a benefit over the already existing avenues.

And that's on page 9, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of that report.

Here's what else this government's own Law Reform

Commission has to say about this:

A residents' bill of rights can be given legal recognition in several ways. The most straightforward is the approach adopted in Ontario and British Columbia: legislating a uniform bill of rights applicable to all long-term care facilities. Manitoba, however, requires each long-term care home to develop a bill of rights in consultations with its residents and sets out a minimum standard.

That's page 9, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It goes on:

The Commission prefers the Manitoba approach because it actively engages the facilities and the residents in designing protections for civil rights. Engaging these parties will assist in furthering the education function of the bill of rights. This approach also has the benefit of addressing several concerns expressed in response to the *Consultation Paper*. A minimum core content of rights prescribed by law ensures a baseline of equal civil rights in long-term care homes while, at the same time, allowing individual homes a role to play in enunciating these rights. For example, this would allow each facility to set its own visiting hours to conform to a legislated guideline stating that residents must be allowed to receive visitors at reasonable hours, instead of simply imposing exact hours upon facilities through legislation.

And that is on page 10, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So one of the very clear recommendations from this government's own Law Reform Commission is this: "Legislation should set out a minimum standard for a residents' bill of rights, with each long-term care home drafting its own document." And that is on page 10.

Another one of the very clear recommendations from this government's own Law Reform Commission is this: "Each long-term care home should be required to prominently post its residents' bill of rights."

So faced with repeated stories, faced with this government's refusal to listen to the concerns and act, faced with this government's decision to actually scrap minimum care standards, and faced with the recommendations of this government's own Law Reform Commission, we decided to introduce our own bill. This Bill 606, *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act* guarantees respect, dignity, and safety for seniors in Saskatchewan care homes.

Our proposed legislation goes further than the government's current guidelines. For example, our proposed legislation requires care plans to comply with minimum quality of care standards which the government would have to set out in regulations, not in guidelines. It requires that the bill of rights be posted in prominent locations and easily accessible to residents and staff. It is more specific in the enumeration of rights, including the right of seniors to choose their recreational activities and select the clothing to be worn each day, whereas the government guidelines are very broad. It also spells out the specific rights of residents or their supporters to transparency and accountability, including how to make a complaint to an authority outside the facility.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 609, *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act* be now read a second time.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Riversdale has moved that Bill No. 609, *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act* be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just very briefly to join the debate, certainly the member from Riversdale has moved a very important piece of legislation that should improve the care that is given to residents in long-term care and improve the lot of seniors across the province generally.

Pursuant to agreement between the sides, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to wrap it up a bit early. So at this point I would adjourn debate on Bill No. 609 in order that preparations might be undertaken for committee which comes along very shortly. But with that, I'd move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 609.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 609, *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To facilitate the work of committees this afternoon, I move that this House do now adjourn.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:23.]

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Liquor and Gaming Authority
Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission
Minister Responsible for the Lean Initiative

Hon. Scott Moe
Minister of Environment
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Water Security Agency
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Water Corporation

Hon. Don Morgan
Minister of Education
Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan
Workers' Compensation Board

Hon. Greg Ottenbreit
Minister Responsible for Rural and Remote Health

Hon. Jim Reiter
Minister of Government Relations
Minister Responsible for First Nations,
Métis and Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated

Hon. Lyle Stewart
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Crop
Insurance Corporation

Hon. Christine Tell
Minister Responsible for Corrections and Policing

Hon. Gordon Wyant
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Minister Responsible for SaskBuilds